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Maroussia : a maid of Ukraine

P.-J. Stahl, Marko Vovchok



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DANILO TCHABANE AND HIS FAMILY.

Marousia, Frontispiece.

Trans.
MAROUSSIA
"

A MAID OF UKRAINE

by
Pierre Jules Hetzel
"

FROM THE FRENCH OF P. J. STAHL *par.*

BY

CORNELIA W. CYR



NEW YORK
DODD, MEAD & COMPANY
PUBLISHERS

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M A R O U S S I A.

CHAPTER I.

UKRAINE.

I AM about to relate what took place a long time ago in Ukraine, in an unknown but fresh and charming part of that country.

I like little-known lands. Travelers do not visit them. Left to themselves, they keep to themselves their retreats and their secrets, their flowers and their feelings, their hardships and their simple pleasures. Their history is not known to every one. The customs of their people are their own; if they are proud of all this, it is without suspecting it. One finds there what one does not find anywhere else; people and scenes are new. These countries, without the world's knowing it, oftentimes have their heroes, real heroes.

I admire also these heroes, especially if they are real heroes, upright and sincere:

When they do great things they do not shout in a loud voice : " Behold ! Behold ! It is I who have done this ! Come and reward me ! " Being what they are, they cannot help being heroic.

But enough of philosophy, as my teacher used to say when he saw that we were not of his opinion. Let me relate the story.

In the little corner of Ukraine of which I am going to tell you, there was once a house, built like all houses in the country ; and in this house lived a Cossack, Danilo Tchabane, and his family.

Do not, I beg of you, confound the Cossacks of Ukraine with those of Don, those bearded creatures with terrible round eyes, coarse speech, and impudent manners ; they do not resemble each other at all.

The Ukrainians do not wear a beard until they are fifty years old. It follows that in this country you find either gray beards or no beards. The young men wear a mustache like the Poles. The Ukrainians are tall, strong, and slender ; they have, mostly, regular features, clearly marked eyebrows, large almond-shaped eyes, a calm, noble expression,

a little severe, which may sometimes appear sad.

Do you wish to know what the word Cossack means? Cossack is a Turkish word, and means "warrior on horseback."

During the time when Ukraine was a republic, and made war upon the Turks, the latter described the unknown heroes with whom they fought by the name of Cossacks. I will not relate all the wars of this republic, it would take too long a time. Suffice it to say, that for long years it was between two fires, as we say, great Russia and Poland. We might even say between four fires, if we should count the Turks and the Tartars. At last, not being able to agree with Poland, this republic had accepted the "fraternal" propositions of Russia.

"We are too weak to contend any longer with our neighbors. We have maintained the fight gloriously until now, it is true; but we will end by being crushed. Russia proposes an alliance with us, let us accept it."

Thus thought and spoke the old Chief, Bogdan Khmielnitski, and the people agreed with him.

In the beginning everything was pleasant. Equality, fraternity, liberty, the Russians respected all; but, little by little, things changed.

In less than a year the people had a thousand reasons for asking their Chief Bogdan : " What have we done ? "

The old chief, on hearing this, wept inconsolably.

" Let us try to remedy it," he said, but he did not succeed, and died of grief.

After his death Ukraine had to undergo many trials. She was divided into two parties; one was for Russia, the other for Poland.

A third party was formed; this one was for the complete independence of Ukraine. Unfortunately it was not very large. It is just at this time that our story begins.

The Cossack, Danilo Tchabane, with his family, lived in the the country. The most difficult person to please would have been satisfied with his home.

Danilo had inherited his little house; his father, who had inherited it from his father, who also had inherited it from his father, had given it to him when dying. I do not

know how many generations of Tchabanes had lived there.

Take note of this, however much of a desert a place may be which a Ukraine family comes to inhabit, the first spring covers it with flowers. Then you may imagine what a paradise of flowers Danilo's home must have been, after so many generations of Tchabanes had added their flowers to those of their ancestors.

In any case, the home of Danilo would never have given the idea of a desert. On the contrary, situated as it was between an immense steppe and a vast forest, between a deep river and a velvety prairie, between a high mountain and a fresh valley, it was indeed a charming spot.

The endless and balmy steppe, extending to the north, seemed like an ocean of verdure, enameled with flowers. To the south arose mountains, some woody and green as emerald, others rough and rocky. A beautiful valley, without roads or footpaths, spread itself out toward the east. The dark-blue river watered the prairie. Here it reflected the azure of heaven among the swinging reeds, there it

became entangled among the dark rocks and bubbled under a gray granite arch.

How beautiful was this corner of the world ! When the sun arose, the prairie, covered with dew, sparkled like a shower of diamonds. The birds, hidden in the reeds, began to fly and to sing, and a delicate veil of mist, gilded by its first beams, swung gently over the river. How full of perfume was this peaceful valley then !

And what shall we say of the mountain tops ? They shone like steel. And the forest ? It awoke gently. And the steppe ? It reflected light and shade as far as the eye could pierce its depths.

Such was the dawn, but how can I paint the day for you, the inundation of light under an azure arch, the triumphant songs of the birds, the murmur of the waves, all nature full of joy.

As to the evenings, the peaceful rosy evenings of Ukraine, you can easily imagine them. The stars show themselves one by one to welcome the moon, which is appearing in its sweet majesty, and, at the horizon, violet bands of varied shades send their last rays to

light the dark and silent steppe. The edge of the forest becomes solemn, almost severe. Two great rocks, enveloped with mystery, stand as companions, rising like blocks of black jet, lighted from above. Finally, there is the bushy little garden full of cherry-trees in bloom, and the cheerful windows of the little house glistening between the branches of wild roses. Such was the home of Danilo. But I have been wrong in trying to describe things which your eyes would never tire of seeing.

And beside all these splendors and blessings of God, the occupants of this cottage had close at hand good neighbors, tried friends.

On holidays, Danilo Tchabane's family received many visitors. Sometimes it was Semène Vorochilo who came, sometimes Andry Krouk, or, instead, you could hear afar off the fresh and musical voice of Hanna, laughing pleasantly. Or you might see the little boat of Vassil Grime which was approaching the shore,—and after him five, ten others, men, women, young girls and young men, children, and even old people. Every one was eager to visit Danilo.

But what is the use of naming all his friends! You see they were many; when I have added that they were true, were real friends, what more can I say? I do not pretend to teach how good a thing friendship is. If you have this feeling for some one who is worthy of it, you know what it is worth. The word of a friend, the look of a friend, his hand in yours, make three-fourths of the joy of life. If you have never known this happiness, my words will not teach it to you. Be worthy of having friends, we will talk of friendship afterwards, for until you are, were you wiser than the great Solomon himself, you could understand nothing of it.

Certainly people could live very happily in a spot like this, if men were like sheep and only wanted rich pasturage.

But the human mind has the right to raise itself to higher aspirations. The true happiness of a people can never be obtained from the mere satisfaction of material wants, moral contentment only can give relish to the food we eat. Now I have already given you to understand, and you have taken the hint, dissatisfaction was everywhere.

The wearied country, drawn in one direction by the Russians, in another by the Polish aristocracy, harassed on both sides, was in open rebellion and regretted bitterly its lost independence. Ukraine was invaded by the Russian troops. The chief of the Muscovite party was loaded with presents and favors by the Tzar, the chief of the Polish party had fortified himself in a city and invited all the friends of liberty to come and join him.

Which side to take ?

The times were trying, very trying ! The eyes which were ordinarily the driest shed tears, and the wisest heads shook. The children themselves could hardly breathe.

CHAPTER II.

AN UNKNOWN TRAVELER.

THERE was a reunion at the house of Danilo Tchabane. The evening was dark, the guests thoughtful and silent. The leaders themselves found it difficult to be cheerful. They looked at each other more than they conversed. It was evident that every one felt the same anxiety.

From time to time Andry Krouk was asked : "Are the walls of Tchigurine strong enough to endure an assault? Are its defenders brave men? Will you read again the last proclamation of the chief? Some of us have not yet heard it. Do you know if there are many volunteers?"

Andry Krouk, evidently well informed on all these points, answered very readily. He described the ramparts of Tchigurine, its ditches, gates, and trenches like a man who had been there and had seen them all more than once, and very recently too.

When the men talked, the spinning-wheels stopped and the women listened anxiously. When the men smoked their pipes in silence, the women conversed in a low tone of voice.

"There has been another battle near Vélíka," said one.

"How many killed?" asked Moghila.

"They have burnt Terny; the houses are nothing but cinders, and the village of Kri-nitza is still burning."

"Do you know," said a young girl, "do you know if?"

But she could say no more; her lips grew white, her eyes filled with tears, while her teeth, closed by agony, prevented further speech.

An old woman, with a brown handkerchief over her head, from which escaped waves of beautiful gray hair, with a face rigid and white, and large black eyes sparkling like stars, said:

"My children are all dead. I am alone in the world. They said to me: 'We are going to fight.' I looked at them and answered: 'Yes, my children!' They added: 'Ukraine will reconquer her independence,' and I an-

swered, again : ' Yes, my children.' All three died on the battle-field, and Ukraine is not free."

" Ah ! " said a young woman, " our friends are killed and nothing yet is gained by it. If one could only say to oneself : ' I die, but I leave to others that for which I fought.' "

The old woman interrupted her :

" You don't understand me. When the life of our country is at stake we do not calculate, we do not ask ourselves, ' Shall we succeed ? ' But we say, ' It is our duty,' and we rush into the fight. If we are killed, we die gloriously; it is a better lot than to live meanly. My children acted thus. May God keep their souls ! If it were to be done over, they would do the same again."

" You are right, you are right," said many of the women.

Others said nothing, but wept. The children also were troubled ; they did not play, they neither laughed nor cried, but stood in the corners, breathing softly, observing the faces of the older people and listening to their conversation.

A little, very little girl, with golden hair,

extremely brilliant large eyes and rosy lips, alone seemed entirely absorbed by her own affairs. She had pieces of straw in her apron and was braiding a pretty mat.

The evening wore away ; it grew darker and darker, more and more quiet. Everybody was still ; the little girl fell asleep with the unfinished mat in her hand.

Night came and the stars began to shine.

Suddenly some one knocked at the door.

It was so unexpected that no one could believe his ears ; but there was a second, and again a third knock, very distinct, very loud.

The master of the house arose and went to open the door. His guests and friends lighted their pipes and began to smoke. Another knock, sharper and more distinct, was heard on the window. The smokers started, the children looked at each other ; Danilo half-opened the door.

"Who is there ?" he asked.

A voice answered, a strong, manly voice, that a lost traveler asked for hospitality.

"You are welcome," said Danilo, and he opened wide the door, inviting the traveler to enter.

A few stars were seen, a fresh breath of the night air entered the warm room ; then, upon the doorstep appeared a man of great height, so very tall that he was obliged to lower his head in order to enter the door.

Beauty is not rare in Ukraine, nevertheless the traveler who entered the room could with difficulty have found his equal.

His face was one of those noble faces by which the most careless glances are arrested with a sudden feeling of respect. Every one would say on seeing him : " This man is a man among all men." His tall figure was well formed and supple. His entire person betokened calmness and strength ; but never were diamonds, stars, or the lightning so bright as the black eyes which shed light around him.

Danilo and his friends were struck with his appearance ; but the Ukrainians know how to keep their thoughts to themselves, and they let nothing of this be seen. They received the traveler as every traveler ought to be received in a respectable house, with cordiality and kind attention. They placed him at a table and hastened to offer him some food.



"ENTER AND WELCOME," SAID DANILO.

Marousia, Page 14.

The stranger appeared simple, modest, polished, and reserved. Being unknown, and consequently having no right to the special interest of his hosts and their friends, he did not try to show his importance. He did not relate his adventures as others might have done. He did not think it his duty to make strangers acquainted with his projects, if he had any. He did not examine either the people or the house indiscreetly. He did not ask questions. He answered in a few words. If he spoke, it was about the things which, at such a moment interested every one : of the troubles of the country, of the burnt villages and devastated fields which he had seen on his way.

Danilo and his friends imitated this reserve. They probably wondered whence he came, where he was going, and in what part of the country he was born ; but since he did not tell them, they did not ask him. They could very well see that, although young, he knew many things, Turkish manners, Polish customs, Russian character, and Tartar habits. It seemed also as if the district of the Setch was not unknown to him.

As to Ukraine, he was well acquainted with it ; he had visited, perhaps lived, in the large cities as well as the villages and hamlets. More than one of Danilo's friends had noticed a scar on the traveler's left cheek, and had wondered where he had received a wound, caused very surely by a sharp weapon. This was his business. Every one has his secrets.

In the mean time, the stranger himself, reassured without doubt by the welcome which he had received, became more communicative. He described with startling vividness the battles which had just taken place. They could almost think they were taking a part in them with him. They listened, scarcely daring to breathe. The men, generally impassive, became excited ; the women cried and sobbed ; the children, having lost all desire to sleep, hung breathless on his lips.

Suddenly, two shots were heard, then many more. After a short interval, they heard firing again. There was silence. They listened. The shots seemed to come from the steppe. They listened a long time, but nothing more was heard.

‘ What ! Is it possible ! Firing is heard

even in your quiet districts?" said the traveler.

"That firing must have been on the great road of Tchigurine," said Andry Krouk.

"The noise came from all quarters successively," said Danilo, shaking his head.

It was growing late. The women arose to return to their homes, it was time to put the children to bed. More than one mother had taken her child in her arms. Some were tall and strong, others were small and delicate; some were young, some old; but all had the same look, that expression of energetic will, which people have when, after many struggles and endeavors, they are resolved to do everything, even suffer death with fortitude.

They said good-by on the threshold, exchanging an affectionate smile and a friendly shake of the hand. Everything passed as usual, and yet they felt a storm in the air. The eyes of these wives, mothers, sisters, and girls sparkled brilliantly.

"Adieu! Adieu! Good-night," they said.

Then they separated in the somber paths and disappeared. The two intimate friends, Andry Krouk and Semène Vorochilo, remained with Danilo. The traveler remained also.

CHAPTER III.

LITTLE MAROUSSIA.

EVERY one having gone, the mistress of the house went into another room.

"Is there any way of reaching Tchigu-rine?" asked the traveler. He lowered his voice involuntarily in asking this question, as will happen where we feel that danger may be nearer than we wish to think.

"It must be difficult," answered Danilo, also lowering instinctively his voice.

His two friends said nothing, but they blew out two large puffs of smoke from their pipes and knitted their heavy eyebrows.

This expressed without words, but very clearly, that they were of the same opinion as Danilo. The traveler looked for a moment upon the impassive face of Danilo, then upon the faces, no less impassive, of his two friends. One look alone of his piercing eyes was sufficient to tell them what an acquaintance he had had with peril, how he despised danger,

and also, what skill he possessed, when necessary, in guarding against the blows which chance might inflict upon him.

This silent confidence established,—“Nevertheless,” said he, “it is necessary that I go there, and by the shortest and most direct route.”

“Directly to Tchigurine !” exclaimed Andry Krouk ; “just now a crow itself couldn’t fly there.”

“Is it very far ?” asked the traveler.

“The length of the journey matters little to him who has good legs, if the road is good,” said Semène Vorochilo ; “but were the road very short, it would be of no use to you if impassable.”

While speaking these words, Semène Vorochilo looked fixedly into the eyes of the traveler.

“We travelers,” answered the unknown, “are not always free to choose the road which is most pleasant. For want of a good, we must content ourselves with a poor one. But what does it matter; when it is certain that we ought to go to a place, we must not hesitate. We are very fortunate if we can pro-

cure a guide, faithful and sure. I will not hide from you, honorable sirs, that it has happened to me more than once to meet, at the moment when I least expected it, the brave heart, the vigorous arm, and tireless feet of which I had need."

At these words of the stranger, Danilo and his two friends raised their heads.

"You speak the truth, honorable traveler," answered Danilo; "a brave and devoted companion is worth all the treasure of the world."

"Brave hearts are not lacking in Ukraine," said Andry Krouk, "In this respect I can say no country surpasses ours."

"Well answered, Krouk," said Danilo. "The Poles may boast of having intrepid nobles, the Turks of magnificent sultans, the Russians of brave and skillful men. As to us, we affirm one thing which is worth all the others; it is that we are brothers, neither more nor less."

"Almost without an exception, you are right," answered the traveler.

"In the best fields you will find some tares," quickly replied Danilo; "is the wheat less good for that?"

"Certainly not," said Vorochilo; "still there is something to be considered."

"Tell us what it is," said the traveler.

"It is this: One doesn't always know the good grain from the bad. He who wears a black cowl isn't always a monk."

"The good shepherd will know his sheep, even under the wolf's skin," said the stranger.

There was silence; they looked at each other once more. They understood each other; words became useless.

"Brothers, greeting!" said the traveler. "The people of Setch present to you their respect and friendship. I am their Envoy. I am going to Tchigurine."

"We are at your command, we are your friends," said the three Ukrainians.

"What have you to tell me? What do you know? What is going on about you?" asked the Envoy of the Setch.

"Nothing good," answered Danilo; "one party has allied itself to the Russians, the other, after having invited the Turks to come to their aid, is perhaps at this very moment in negotiation with Poland."

"That is only too true," said Danilo's two

friends, and their manly faces showed deep grief.

"The more reason that I should go to Tchigurine," answered the Envoy of the Setch, "and without losing time."

"All the roads are closed," said Vorochilo.

"The road to Gonna?"

"Occupied and put in a state of defense by the Russians."

The Envoy was thinking, not of the difficulties, but of the means of reaching his destination.

"We Cossacks of the Setch," he said at last, "are neither for the Russians nor for the Poles. We are for the Ukrainians. You see, indeed, that I must reach Tchigurine. Of your two chiefs, one has sold himself, they say, but the other?"

"The other, the Ataman Petro Dorochenko," said Krouk, "is an honest man."

"I know it," said the Envoy. "But, proud, passionate, and impulsive as he is, it is to be feared that in trying to save Ukraine, he will ruin her. In his anger against the Russians, he forgets that we have other enemies. He is on the point of committing a mistake and

of adding fuel to the fire. My mission is to prevent this ; but to succeed, I must see him. If I delay—”

Here the Envoy ceased and looked all around him. The mistress of the house was still absent, two little boys were sleeping quietly on a long bench. He was on the point of continuing, when suddenly, at the extremity of the room, he perceived two sparkling eyes fixed upon him, which seemed to drink in his words. He was about to rise and go toward this disturbing vision, when, to his great surprise, he discovered that these ardent eyes were those of a simple and graceful child, hidden in a dark corner of the room, and looking at him like a charmed bird.

Danilo, having followed the glances of the Envoy, had discovered the object of his attention.

“That is my daughter,” said he, “my brave child, wise beyond her age”; and, calling her, “Maroussia,” said he, “come here.”

Maroussia approached.

She was a genuine little Ukrainian girl, about twelve years of age, with velvety eyebrows, and cheeks browned by the sun ; beau-

tiful as much by the expression of her charming face, as by the purity of her features, a true type of her race. She wore an embroidered chemise in the fashion of her country, a skirt of deep blue, with a red sash about her waist; her beautiful hair, arranged in long braids, rippled and shone like silk. The girls of this country wear wreaths of flowers in the summer. Maroussia still had some red flowers in her hair.

"Maroussia," her father said to her, "you were listening to our conversation."

"I did not wish to listen," said Maroussia, "but in spite of myself I heard you, and having heard, I listened."

"Well, then, what did you hear, my child?"

"I heard everything."

Her voice was very musical.

"Tell me what you heard, my daughter."

The brilliant eyes of Maroussia turned toward the Envoy of the Setch.

"I understood that it is necessary for our good friend here to reach Tchigurine very soon, and that for the safety of Ukraine he should see the Ataman."

"You have indeed heard and understood

everything," said Danilo. "Now listen to me, Maroussia, you must not tell a living soul what you have heard. If any one questions you, you know nothing. Do you understand what a secret is?"

"It is something that one must keep at any price," answered the child.

"Very well, then," said her father in a grave voice, "you are the guardian of a secret."

"Yes, father," said Maroussia.

Danilo said no more. Maroussia had no promise to make, but there was something in these words, "yes, father," spoken by this child as she spoke them, to reassure one more incredulous than St. Thomas himself.

"Where is your mother?" asked Danilo.

"She is preparing supper."

"Go and tell her that your little brothers are asleep."

Maroussia went toward the door, but at the moment of opening it, stopped suddenly, listening to a strange noise which was heard from without. It seemed like a troop of horsemen galloping toward the house. Rapidly the noise grew louder, cries and oaths

were mingled with the neighing of horses. In an instant there was a tumult like the arrival, at a rapid gait, of a whole detachment; creaking wagons and swearing could be heard.

The door opened and the mistress of the house appeared, as white as a sheet.

"They are soldiers, a squadron, a regiment perhaps. They are there—"

"We must keep cool," said Danilo.

The Envoy of the Setch had arisen, but without haste the others did the same. Not a word was spoken; each one was thinking.

Maroussia's mother fastened the door, and, placing her back against it, awaited the orders of her husband. Maroussia stood beside her mother; her lips grew white, but her face was calm.

"Vorochilo, you and Krouk are asleep," said Danilo. "My wife and daughter are sewing, and I am away from home. I have gone to see a friend. Vorochilo and Krouk have come to buy my oxen; they have been drinking a little and they fall asleep while waiting for me. We must try to gain time."

Then, speaking to the Envoy of the Setch:

"The front of the house alone is guarded,

the kitchen window leads into the garden. Follow me."

Danilo, on going out, exchanged a look with his daughter.

All this was done as quickly as a scene-shifting arranged a long time in advance. The two men lying upon benches were sleeping as quietly as the little boys. The mistress of the house and her daughter were sewing. Danilo and the Envoy had disappeared.

"Get down from your horse and knock at the door!" cried a loud voice.

"Blood and thunder! Break in the door!" exclaimed another voice more peremptorily than the first.

The mistress of the house, with her work in her hand, went to the window.

"Who is there? What do you want?" said she in a tone, not one note of which trembled.

But the only answer was the sound of some panes of glass knocked out of the window. A big face, red with anger, with a bristling mustache, leaned over the broken panes, casting irritated and defiant glances into every corner of the room.

"Why do you look at me?" cried this person. "Why don't you open the door? Would you rather that we knock it down?"

The mistress of the house, thus questioned, drew back a little. "My children fell asleep," said she, and the truth is they are still sleeping, the little innocents. "The two men are sleeping also. Don't make so much noise."

"Open the door, silly fool!" vociferated the red face.

Danilo's wife, as if paralyzed by fear, did not move an inch.

The door shook under the resounding blows, but it did not yield.

The man with the red face succeeded in forcing half of his body through the broken window, and in aiming his pistol at the woman's breast :

"If your door is not wide open in one second I will shoot you like a crow!"

The poor woman took one step toward the door, she seemed like a statue of stone trying to obey an order which she did not understand.

"Cursed woman!" cried the officer. But some one from without, drawing him back,

pulled him from the window. The face of another officer appeared.

"Woman," said he, "your whole house will be burned, and not one of you come out alive, if your door is not opened at once to our men."

The mistress of the house, as though insane with fright, rushed to the door; but, either from awkwardness or terror, the key did not seem to turn in the lock. "I am opening," she said, "I am opening, my lords; don't you see? But this lock confuses me; to-morrow I must have it changed."

At last the door was opened.

It had taken a long enough time.

Officers and men rushed into the cottage and began searching every corner. They seemed like wolves in search of a prey which had escaped them.

The youngest boy, wakening suddenly, began screaming loudly. The older one saw everything, but did not flinch.

"Squalling brat, be still!" said one of the soldiers to the little boy who was crying.

The officer with the red face said nothing to him, but with a kick of his foot sent the

child rolling, mute with terror, under the very bench upon which he had just been sleeping.

“Coward!” said the older brother. “Coward! When I am a man—”

The ugly red-faced man had something else to do than to listen to him. With a second kick of his foot he aroused Krouk, who seemed sound asleep, and opened and shut his eyes alternately, with painful effort.

Vorochilo, awakened in the same manner, didn't seem to know what to think on beholding his assailants. He called the big officer, “Good fellow Générasime,” and the other one, “good fellow Stéphane”; he smiled upon one and winked his eye in a friendly manner to the other; then falling back on his bench, he said :

“Let us sleep, it is time.”

The soldiers examined him one by one.

“It is he,” said some of them. “It is not he,” said others. “What a race of knaves! There is not one of them who is not a traitor!”

“Silence!” cried the red-faced man.

He had seated himself at a table, and, making a brutal sign to the mistress of the house :

“Come here,” he said.

She approached him.

"Who are you?" he asked her.

"I am the wife of Danilo Tchabane."

"Where is your husband?"

"He is gone to see a friend."

"Listen! I am going to teach you what a friend is." He took a knout which one of his soldiers was carrying, a knout with a carved and richly ornamented handle.

"And these two men, these two drunkards, these two dogs, who are they?"

And, to point them out better, he struck Kronk on the shoulder with his knout and Vorochilo in the face.

"Will you speak?" he cried, making a threatening step toward her.

The woman recoiled in horror, as if she had suddenly found herself face to face with a wild beast. But, after an effort to overcome her terror, she answered:

"They are my neighbors, my lords; they came to buy some oxen and fell asleep waiting for my husband."

"Yes, my lord, we came to buy three oxen from Danilo," said Andry Krouk, who at last awoke from his sleep. "Yes, for three oxen

which we had promised to deliver to-morrow, and we didn't find Danilo at home; think what a disappointment! 'Very well!' I said to my companion"; he pointed to Vorochilo, who, awake also, scarcely seemed able to open his eyes,—“ 'very well!' I said to my companion, 'Danilo isn't here; it's a pity!' 'Yes,' answered my companion, 'it's a pity! Nothing can be done.' 'What bad luck!' said I, 'but what can we do? He isn't here.' 'Yes,' answered my companion, 'he isn't here!' 'Here is a day lost.' 'Yes, lost,' said he, 'but what can we do? We can't foresee everything.' 'Yes,' continued he, 'we can't foresee everything. Besides all this, the market for to-morrow?' ”

“Will you stop, rascal?” cried the red-faced man. “O traitors! I know you, and see through your innocence. Soldiers, bind these knaves, and strongly too.”

It was quickly done. Andry Krouk and Semène Vorochilo were securely bound in an instant.

At this moment the master of the house entered the room.

“Who are you?” roared the red-faced man.

"This is decidedly the chief of the band. How did they let you enter here?"

"I am the owner of this cottage, my lord," answered Danilo, bowing respectfully. "You are in my house, and I return home."

"Hello! you men there, put sentinels at the door and allow no one to go in or out. Do you understand me?" said the officer to his men. Then, addressing Danilo:

"If you wish to live, answer me without waiting to be urged. Where is the bandit whom we seek? Let your answer be plain, Judas! If you answer me with nonsense, I will blow you into atoms. Now bear this in mind. Where is Zaparogue?"

"Zaparogue!" answered Danilo with calmness and surprise, "this is the first time in my life that his name has ever been mentioned before me. I do not know Zaparogue."

"That wont do!" growled the officer. "Do you want to make me believe that you don't know the bandits who lead you? It is the same as if you told me that my men don't know their chiefs. This Zaparogue is in this district; he came in here, where is he? Tell me quickly, or I will burn your house

and roast you, your wife, and little ones in it."

"My lord," answered Danilo, "I affirm that I have never heard of the man whom you have just named."

"You will not tell! Very well! Your business is settled." And, turning to Vorochilo and Andry Krouk, "Rascals," he said to them, "without doubt you know nothing of this Zaparogue either? May the pestilence choke him!"

"I ask many pardons, my lord," answered Vorochilo, who seemed more dead than alive, "but I—"

"Speak then, you beast?"

"I saw him."

"You saw him, and did not at once denounce him, you traitor?"

"I was too much afraid, my lord, I lost my wits, and then—"

"And then, rogue?"

"And then he was gone."

"Where did you see him?"

"At the fair for oxen, my lord, at Frosny."

"With whom was he?"

"With a large dog, my lord, a large black

dog, a superb dog, very fine breed, which barked like a hundred devils, and which—”

“Imbecile! Dog, yourself! It doesn't matter about the dog; but I want to know about the master and the villains like you. This Zaparogue, doubtless, was not alone, was there a band of rogues following him?”

“A band of rogues, my lord, what band?”

“Cursed fool! was there a crowd of men and women running after him?”

“Yes, my lord, a whole crowd. They jostled each other, they cried—”

“Their names?”

“What names, my lord?”

“The names of those who ran after him.”

“But it was the crowd, my lord, only the crowd.”

“Ah! Animal! Beast!”

“Don't you see,” said the other officer, “that this peasant is an idiot? You are losing time with him.”

“You astonish me, my dear sir,” said another officer, who had remained seated during this scene. “Why this haste? Have we not time to seize this scamp? Is there nothing more pressing than to shoot him? If he has

escaped us, it is not for a long time. Do you forget that we have been running like crazy people, since this morning, without eating or drinking, and it is not healthful to have an empty stomach? Is not this an agreeable little house, would it displease you to have a good supper here? After supper we shall be only more disposed to begin again the hunt for this bandit. Zounds! my dear sir, you are as red as a cock! Have you forgotten, unfortunate man, the doctor's advice? 'No excitement, no anger, moderate exercise, regular meals.' And your poor wife, who made me promise so often to watch over you, to care for you like a brother, she would be in a pretty state of mind if she could see in what senseless anger you allow yourself."

"Be silent," answered the red-faced man in a choking voice. "Be silent, and we will have supper."

And, turning to Danilo :

"You have heard?" he said. "Let everything that is good in your pantry be put on this table in two minutes, in two minutes!" and he struck a blow on the table which shook the house.

“Odarka,” said Danilo to his wife, “be quick.”

Odarka went out of the room carrying in her arms the two little boys. The older resisted ; he did not wish to leave his father.

She reappeared very soon with her hands full of dishes. She was calm and silent. Nevertheless, her eyes looked over the room with a certain uneasiness.

Semène Vorochilo and Andry Krouk, with their hands tied behind them and their legs bound by strong cords, were standing in a corner of the room. Danilo with his arms folded stood in another corner. With the exception of a sentinel who guarded the door, the soldiers had disappeared. The officers seated at the table, sabres by their side and pistols at hand, were eating, drinking, laughing and talking gaily.

But where then was little Maroussia, all this time ?

The beautiful skies of this country, the singular and peculiar beauty of its stars, the depth and transparency of its blue vault, are a source of astonishment and innocent envy to the occasional travelers who visit it.

That night was magnificent. Maroussia, light and silent as a shadow, had disappeared a few moments after the return of Danilo. Had the glance of her father, incomprehensible to any one else, told her what she must try to do, or had she only followed her own intuitions? At any rate, it was then that she glided, unseen, out of the room, and having passed, as impalpable as a thought, through the midst of the soldiers and horses which surrounded the house, reached the garden.

Once there, the child stopped under a cherry-tree and pressed her hand on her heart as if to stop its throbbing. Her little heart was beating as if it would burst. Her head was on fire. Scalding tears flowed from her eyes. She was sad, sad enough to die, but not overcome. She hoped for help, without knowing whence it was to come. The breeze cooled her forehead and calmed the agitation of her breast. Had any one noticed her flight? The confused but monotonous murmur of the soldiers' voices reached and reassured her. The roaring and laughing of the officers, whose sports were under no restraint, also reached her. They were laughing, but

what was she going to do? Her glances rested on this house which held all she loved and venerated.

How dear this place was to her! How dear to her, also, was the whole of Ukraine! The child knelt down and kissed with her burning lips the ground which she was going to abandon.

"Our Father in Heaven, help me," she said. She arose, encouraged. Everything was incredibly peaceful beneath the flowery branches. She advanced some steps forward, and penetrated with precaution to the right among the thick shrubbery. Then she went to the left, listening all the time, scarcely breathing. Her eye examined every shadow; she scrutinized even the smallest nooks. Was she seeking some one?

At last she was standing under the tall apple-trees. What! Nothing, no one to be seen! She looked all around her for the last time. You could see by the light of the stars how pale and anxious she was.

Suddenly she started, a frightened bird had just flown from her nest. She was annoyed with herself. A butterfly, which she had

awakened, fluttered against her face and made her tremble. Was she then so weak?

She stood a long time resting against a tree, the foliage of which protected and concealed her. The wind scattered the white apple-blossoms over the green grass. She said to herself: "It is like snow." She feared that the rustling of the leaves would stop another noise, the feeble indication of which she seemed to await with bent head and listening ear.

Ah! A few steps from her, between two trees, stands,—she is not deceived? Isn't it a shadow? No! It is the tall, slight figure of the new friend, for whom her father and mother are suffering, for whom she, like them, will brave everything. The figure is no longer motionless, it glides like a serpent among the branches of the trees.

The Envoy, doubtless, is searching for the little path that leads to the river. With a quick step, Maroussia runs after him. Very soon the noise of the river is heard, only a thicket separates it from him. He leans over, examines, and, at the foot of an enormous tree, whose branches dip in the river, he sees

a boat. "A boat! It is the very thing I want! A river is the road which never betrays." He is going to break through the thicket which separates him from it. Suddenly two little hands seize his arm, and a voice says to him in a very low tone: "No! no! not that,—not by that boat! The river is a mirror upon which everything can be seen, even from a great distance."

Truly, he is much astonished, more so than if he had found himself surrounded by ten soldiers, armed to the teeth; but he does not let it be seen. You could have perceived by this that he is a man accustomed to all sorts of surprises.

He turned about and recognized the little girl.

"What are you doing here, my little girl?" smiling on the child, as if he had met her on the promenade, in circumstances the most favorable for a friendly conversation. But a few seconds passed before Maroussia, breathless and much excited, could add anything whatever to the words which she had already spoken.

The man laid his hand on the child's head,

gently stroking her hair, as if to say: "Be calm, my little child." He was strength, skill, intrepidity, and boldness; but at this moment, in the presence of this trembling bird, a divine light of goodness spread over his manly face. His powerful hand, accustomed to murderous arms and the rude weapons of war, became more gentle than that of a mother for Maroussia, he answered her look with a glance full of tenderness. Confidence was established between them. Maroussia spoke:

"The river will not take you to Tchigurine. It is to Tchigurine that you desire to go. I have thought of a way of going there."

"I am listening to you, my child," answered the fugitive. ,

"Let us first go near the old wall, it will conceal us."

When near the old wall, she said:

"Over there, far off in the steppe, my father has a little cabin, a stable, where he leaves the big oxen in summer during harvest time, so as not to bring them back to the house every night. A large wagon, loaded with hay, is before the door, which is to be taken away to-morrow by my father. The

oxen are in the stable waiting for daybreak. We will set out, you and I, in an hour. Then I will yoke, we will yoke the big oxen ; you can hide yourself in the hay, and I will take you first to Knich's house. Knich is a friend of my father and of all his friends. He comes to our house, and when he comes, he talks with the others. I can tell him everything, or, if you do not wish it, I will say nothing to him, but I will try to do—to do—"

She stopped, hesitating, for she knew not what would be best to decide on this point. Nevertheless she continued :

"I will do what you tell me. Oh ! I will do everything !"

While listening to her, the eyes of the strong man became moist.

"Who gave you this idea, Maroussia ?" he asked her.

CHAPTER IV.

A STORY OF BRIGANDS.

"I KNOW a story of brigands which made me think of it," answered the little girl. "I recalled to my mind how the brigand's wife escaped in the story, and I said to myself: 'We will do the same thing.'"

"Since we have a long walk before we reach the stable in the steppe, you will tell me the story on the way, will you not?"

"I shall be glad to. But do you wish to go to Tchigurine? Shall I take you there?"

"Certainly," he answered. "But will your father approve of my accepting you as a guide? Will he scold you afterwards?"

"It is because of my father that I do so. Father looked at me, I understood him. His eyes said to me: 'For this man you must leave everything, even us.'"

"Very well, then; yes, I commit myself to you, little one; you shall lead me, and on the way you can relate to me your story. Let us

go, Maroussia, I am listening already. I like stories of brigands very much."

They took each other by the hand and regained the bank of the river. After a moment, as the child was still silent :

"I am all ears," said he, "but I hear nothing yet."

"Oh !" she answered, "I cannot tell the story just now."

"Why not now, my little girl?"

"We are not far enough from the soldiers; I am listening for them. I am a little afraid, I fear that we—it would cause me so much pain if I did not succeed in leading you to the place where you can do good."

"We must do our best, whatever happens, my little friend. We go trusting in God, and under His protection, my child."

She raised her head and looked at him. Even by the uncertain light of the stars she saw so much confidence and courage on his face that she felt reassured.

"Don't let me wait any longer, Maroussia, I see that you don't know how much I like stories."

Maroussia began :

“Once upon a time, a Cossack married his daughter to a handsome young man.”

“He did well! Your story begins well, if the husband was a good fellow,” said the Envoy.

Instead of answering, Maroussia shook her head from right to left and continued :

“The young girl did not have much affection for her betrothed. He was handsome, but he did not seem kind to her, Nevertheless, as her father was strongly in favor of the marriage, she obeyed, and was married to him. As soon as the wedding was over the husband took his young wife home, very far, oh, very far away.”

“Poor girl!” said the Envoy, “she must have regretted leaving her father and mother.”

“The husband’s house was very beautiful, it was really superb ; it was like a château or a palace, but a lonely palace. It was built in a forest so thick and dark that you could scarcely see the sky through the tops of the tall, bushy trees. There was no appearance of roads or even of paths anywhere around. The husband spent but little time at home with his wife. He would kiss her and say:

‘I will soon return, my dear wife,’ then depart with his companions, and be absent two, three, and even ten days at a time.”

“That was very bad,” said the Envoy.

“When he returned, he talked much more with his comrades than with his wife. He gave her all sorts of jewels and ornaments, it is true, but that did not satisfy her ; she was not a coquette, she felt very unhappy, and little by little became very sad.

“She said to herself : ‘Since my life is so sad, I wish I could die. I have no more hope.’ But we hold on to life after all. The proverb is indeed true, ‘Sorrow visits us very often, but death comes only once.’ One day, when she had been left all alone in the large, gloomy château, and in spite of the sad thoughts filling her mind, she felt very energetic and active, she said to herself :

“‘Why do I remain thus seated and motionless, awaiting death? Let me walk about a little. I shall find the end of my troubles in the garden as well as in a corner of this room.’

“And so she ran out into the garden, which was like a narrow belt of flowers around the

château, between its stone walls and the large forest. Everything was living and blooming in this little garden. 'It isn't such a good thing to die,' she thought, looking at the flowers. 'Ah! If only I were happy, I would rather live!'

"Then she wept, but while weeping, gathered a charming bouquet of lilies of the valley and wild roses, and seeing it so pretty and fragrant, 'Where shall I put you, my poor bouquet?' she said to the flowers. 'My large room is so desolate! You will no sooner be there than you will fade.'

"Then another idea came to her. 'What if I should visit the other rooms; perhaps among the number I might find a small one that I should like.'

"No sooner said than done. She ran through many rooms. All were large, rich, and beautiful, but disagreeable.

" 'This isn't the one, no, this isn't the one I want,' she thought, going from one to another."

Here the Envoy placed his hand on the little girl's mouth.

"Wait a little," he said in a low tone.

"You thought you heard something?" asked Maroussia.

The Envoy knelt down and placed his ear on the ground.

When he arose, he said :

"The detachment has left your father's house, the soldiers are galloping away to the left. If they were taking prisoners with them, they would not ride so fast. Maroussia, I think that your father's family is safe."

"God be thanked," said the child.

They walked some time in silence, busy with their own thoughts.

"The young woman," said the Envoy, "went from one room to another without finding one that she liked, and she said, 'Let me look further.'"

"Yes," said Maroussia, "that was what she said. Suddenly she came to a very narrow door, firmly closed and bolted, which had a strange appearance.

"Ah! she said, 'it is the room behind this little door that I want, I am sure of it.'"

"She used all her strength to open the door, but in vain; and the more impossible it seemed, the greater grew her desire to enter."

"That is it," said her friend, "I recognize a young woman by that."

"What do you mean?" answered Maroussia, astonished.

"I mean that all young women want to know what is behind a closed door."

"Are men different?"

"In general they are more reasonable in such matters."

"More reasonable," said Maroussia, with a thoughtful air; "*reasonable*, then, means that one doesn't desire a thing sufficiently to make the necessary effort to obtain it."

"Do you know, little girl, that what you say is not altogether lacking in good sense?" said the Envoy, laughing. "Nevertheless it would be wiser to say, it is more reasonable not to desire anything too much. But continue, Maroussia. Did this poor woman succeed in opening the door?"

"Yes," answered the little girl. "For a long time she kept working at the door, until, by dint of pulling and shaking, she succeeded in sliding out the bolts, and entered the room."

"At first she thought she was in a box, it was so dark. Pleased to have gained an en-

trance, she could not restrain an 'Ah!' of satisfaction. From the four corners of the room her 'Ah!' was echoed back to her. That surprised her, but not to the point of making her afraid. She concluded, after reflection, that the room had little or no furniture. In fact, having become accustomed to the darkness, she perceived that her inference was right, and, that it was for this reason that her exclamation had been re-echoed back to her many times.

"She tapped on the walls again and again. Her fingers found neither doors nor windows. The four walls were smooth everywhere. Discouraged, she was about to return, when, suddenly, at the right of the door, her hand struck against a little table, upon which she found a lantern and everything necessary for a light. You may very well believe that she lighted it quickly, but her lantern did not show her any other way out of the room. Nevertheless she persisted, saying: 'This room is not the end; it must lead somewhere, it doubtless conceals some secret passage. I will not leave until I find it.'"

"She was obstinate," said the Envoy.

"Oh, no! But how could she help it? Something was impelling her, she was determined to go on. She said indeed to herself: 'My husband may return, and if he does, who knows if he may not blame me for my curiosity?' However, she continued her search just the same."

"Hurrah for woman's perseverance!" said the Envoy, who had listened to Maroussia's story with much interest.

"She moved about in the room, and at last her foot struck a ring of iron.

"She brought the lantern; there was a trap-door in the floor.

"It seemed to her that in all her life she had never been so pleased.

"The trap-door was very heavy for her; but, when we desire anything very much, our efforts generally end in success. She almost broke her fingers, but, at last, she lifted up the door.

"Then she perceived a narrow stairway leading down into a great black hole. She had begun, she could not stop now. 'Although this looks terrible, yet I will go down,' she said. And she did descend the stairs."

"She was brave," said the Envoy.

"She expected surely to see something frightful, but what she saw was more horrible than anything she could have imagined."

"Ah! Dear me!" exclaimed the Envoy.

"The cave was filled with axes, sabres, daggers, pikes, lances, large knives and clubs; with rich clothing, elegant garments covered with blood; with collars of pearls, sets of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, turquoises, and sapphires. All these things were heaped pell-mell on the floor, and everywhere traces of blood could be seen. However, she still doubted, when her attention was drawn by something white as snow which stood out in relief on a piece of black velvet. I scarcely dare to say it, but it was a white hand, white as a marble hand, cut off from the arm, a woman's shapely hand covered with valuable rings.

"'No means of doubting any longer,' she said to herself trembling. 'My husband is a chief of brigands. Our château is worse than a cavern.' And that caused her great grief."

Maroussia was silent for a moment. Her little hand trembled in the large hand of the

Envoy. He had noticed it before. The story was too horrible ; he reproached himself for having urged his poor little guide to relate it. They continued walking. The grass and reeds rustled on the bank of the tranquil river, the breeze scarcely stirred them.

“ Let us stop here in this story,” said the Envoy to Maroussia ; “ it will make you ill to continue to the end, especially if it is more terrible.”

“ More terrible, perhaps, but what does it matter ? ” she said. “ It is the end which you must know in order to understand my idea.” And courageously she continued :

“ The young wife had much to reflect upon, in what she had just discovered. She implored God to guide and protect her.

“ First of all she must get out of this frightful cave. She ascended the stairway, replaced the trap-door, put the lantern in its place, fastened the door well behind her, and, more dead than alive, re-entered her room. She was a hundred times more unhappy since her discovery, and yet she no longer wanted to die, she wished to escape.

“ But how to do so ? ”

Here Maroussia trembled. A noise was heard, a sound of some one or of something which had fallen or had been thrown into the water.

“ Don't be afraid,” said the Envoy, “ it is some animal, an otter perhaps who wished to cross the river ; or a large fish, who jumped out of the water and leaped higher than usual.”

“ Yes, yes,” said Maroussia, “ that is all.” And returning at once to her story :

“ ‘ How to escape indeed,’ said the young woman. The inextricable forest surrounded her home on every side. No outlet could be seen. Certainly she could force her way at the risk of great injury through the heavy underbrush. But, after that, would she know which way to go ? It is so easy to lose oneself in a great forest ! Who could tell, if, after a long day's walk, she would not find herself at the very place from which she had started, and in sight of her angry husband ? ‘ How to escape, how to escape,’ she repeated to herself.

“ Even should I perish in the attempt, she said at last, ‘ I must try ; I will run away ! ’ ”

"That is what I call courage," said the Envoy.

In spite of the grave anxieties which beset him, he was very attentive to the recital of his little companion. By the manner in which he from time to time added a word, Maroussia saw this, and it gave her great pleasure.

It will divert his attention, she thought.

She would have been glad to shorten the story, but then perhaps he would not understand it so well; and, besides, they had time enough for her to tell and for him to hear it all. The cabin in the steppe, the stable of the big oxen were still far away, so she continued:

"The young woman went down again into the flower-garden. She examined the hedge of trees, the green wall which surrounded her like a barricade. The trees were so close together and so tall, that she could only see their tops by bending backward.

"'Nevertheless,' she said to herself, 'when they all go away, they know very well where to find a means of exit. Let me search this way first,' and she went to the right. But she

had only taken a few steps, when she heard a sound like the tramping of horses.

“She stopped, hardly daring to breath, and, protected by the trunk of a large tree, began to listen. She was not mistaken, it was indeed the sound which a troop of horsemen make when riding carefully over a difficult road.

“‘Had I better wait here or go forward?’ For the twentieth time she repeated this question to herself, when she saw the pale face of her husband appearing out of the thicket, pushing back the branches with his hands. His companions followed him as usual. They seemed to come out as if by magic from this green enclosure. There was not a sign of a road where they emerged from the forest.

“There was just time enough for her to hide herself better in the thicket, where she could examine her husband. He alighted from his horse and came forward with a slow step. How sad and tired he looked? Under the weight of what dark thoughts did he lower his eyes?

“‘If he were some one else, and looked

thus,' she said to herself, 'he would be worthy of pity. As to his companions: ah, how savage they looked! What frightful faces!'

"Her husband, without knowing it, passed very near her; the others followed him. She saw with horror that many of them had red stains on their clothing.

"Very soon she heard his voice. He was calling her.

"No, the time had not come when she could escape forever. She came boldly out of the thicket and walked up to him.

"'You are very pale,' he said to her, 'you tremble; you must have taken cold under these trees; don't go there any more,' and taking a small object from his pocket:

"'Here,' he said, 'I have been thinking of you.'

"He gave her a ring which sparkled like the sun. 'There, do you like it?'

"She summoned up all her courage, in order not to refuse the gift, and asked him where he had obtained a jewel of such great value.

"'If my question embarrasses him,' she

said to herself, 'if any hesitancy can be seen in his manner, it will be a proof that he is not altogether hardened.'

"But he answered almost gaily, 'I obtained it in hunting, my dear.'

"'Hunting?' she said.

"And at the same time she thought; 'Whatever happens, I will keep on. I wish to know from himself for what I am to be prepared.' She then added, 'Hunting jewels, in truth that is a new kind of chase, which you must have devised, for in all my life I never heard of so strange a hunt.'

"'Less strange than you think,' he said, 'but very tiresome, so tiresome even, that after having engaged in it, the strongest person has need of rest. That is my case just now, my dear, and with your permission, we are all going to sleep. I am overcome with fatigue. In a few days, if you are good, I will take you to one of these hunts, and I hope you will enjoy it.'

"Thereupon he left her, laughing with a laugh that made her shiver, and went to rest himself in a wing of the old mansion where they lived. His companions did the same.

In a few moments she was the only one awake in the château.

"When she was sure of this, she said to herself, 'Now is the time to escape!'"

Just then the Envoy felt Maroussia's hand press quickly his own.

"What is it?" he said.

Maroussia, putting her finger on her lips to enjoin silence, showed him two green eyes which shone in a large bush on the side of the road.

The Envoy had a holly stick in his hand. He went straight to the thicket.

"Take care!" the child cried to him.

But he had already reached it. A singular noise was heard, it was the flapping of the wings of a great bird of prey, which, disturbed in its retreat, flew heavily away, giving a mournful cry.

"Is it a bad sign?" asked Maroussia.

"There are no bad signs," answered her good friend, giving her a little tap on the cheek.

Maroussia continued her story:

"To regain her strength, the young woman seated herself at the bottom of a rock, which

seemed as if held with enormous pincers by the great roots of an immense tree. She was very slight, and yet the rock yielded so suddenly under her weight that she fell over backwards."

"Good," said the Envoy, "that was the brigands' door."

"Yes, it was the door, the mysterious door. She was so astonished at her fall that she remained some moments without moving. Where was she? A dark green gallery enlarged itself in the shape of a vault above her head; the light did not penetrate it, except in small stars or in rays as fine as a hair; here and there were little points of blue sky.

"Recovered from her surprise, she arose, marked the place of the invisible entrance with a white stone, and had the wisdom to return to the château to be sure of what her husband and his companions were doing.

"They were all sleeping profoundly, as people do who have exhausted their strength. On the tips of her toes she went from door to door, pushing without noise all the bolts and closing the blinds. It was a wise precaution. She took another which was not bad

either ; it was to exchange her white dress, which she usually wore, for a black one ; then she went with a careless air to the place marked by the white stone. When she had found it, she exclaimed, ‘Dear me !’ with a great sigh ; but it was not sufficient just to sigh. She leaned against the rock as she had done before, and at once passed through a second time ; the tall stone door, which was made to look like a rock, was arranged, it seemed, to close itself. She was soon on her feet in the gallery, she began to walk, then to run.

“At the end of a half-hour she came to a place where ten roads spread out in different directions. Which of them ought she to take ? It was a very embarrassing question.”

“Certainly,” said the Envoy.

“She took some steps in one of these roads, and then in another, and thus with the rest, as if to try them. It was of the highest importance not to be deceived. The trouble was that they were all alike, and this made it difficult to choose. Nevertheless, in one of these roads she saw something white. She

ran to it. It was a small handkerchief, with beautifully embroidered corners.

"I hear something following us," said Maroussia, interrupting her story. The Envoy had heard it also. He took Maroussia by the arm, and placed himself before her, with his raised stick in his hand.

"Ah!" said Maroussia, "it is a very large dog."

The Envoy gave a sudden jump and Maroussia was astonished to see how quickly with his heavy stick he felled the animal to the ground unawares.

What took place then between the man and the beast? The Envoy had his knee on the ground; when he arose, the animal was lifeless at his feet.

"It was a wolf," he said quietly to the child; "he must have been very hungry to have followed so near to us."

The wolf was dead.

"Oh!" said Maroussia, "you are not afraid of anything,"

"Yes I am, I am afraid of everything which interrupts your story. The brigand's wife, then, had found a handkerchief."

“Yes,” said Maroussia. “The sight of this handkerchief, so sweetly perfumed, which had not belonged to a man, made her think.

“‘They came this way this morning,’ she said to herself, ‘and if that is so they will probably have nothing more to do here. I must choose this road.’

“But, before starting, the good idea came to her of fastening a pretty red ribbon, which ornamented her corsage, to a branch, standing out in the road opposite the one she was going to take, in such a manner that it could be seen from a distance. ‘They will see this little ribbon there, and thus they will pursue by the road which I have not taken.’ To put them on the wrong scent was not a bad idea, was it?”

“It was very well planned, indeed,” said the Envoy.

“Glad to have thought of that, she started like a deer in the road of the embroidered handkerchief. She ran in it a long, long time. Night came ; it was so dark that she knew no longer what was over her head, whether it was an arch of stone, or a leafy canopy.

“‘I must continue walking, walking,’ she said to herself, when weariness overcame her. ‘God, who has led me so far, will not forsake me.’ Suddenly she struck something. The road made a sharp turn, but instead of complaining of the hurt, she was almost ready in her surprise to give a cry of joy.

“All the stars of heaven were shining at last over her head; no arch, either of stone or of interlacing branches, weighed longer on her. She was in a great open space.”

“Ah! so much the better,” said the Envoy, “that encourages me for her.”

Maroussia for sole response shook her head and pressed his hand more strongly.

“Unfortunately, the poor wife of the brigand chief had little time to rejoice, for, all at once, she heard very distinctly voices, cries, and the noise of horses running at a gallop.

“What could she do now? Where find a refuge? How hide herself? Go back into the gallery? That would be to return to the château.

“There was, in this clearing, a large oak-tree, with thick branches which reached

nearly to the ground. In an instant, like a frightened bird, she climbed from branch to branch until she reached the highest. She did well not to lose any time; a moment more and all the brigands came out of five or six roads at once, for all these galleries led to this clearing.

“ ‘Well, what have you discovered?’ cried a well-known voice to the horsemen who came forward.

“ ‘Nothing,’ answered one. ‘I only found this,’ and he showed the red ribbon.

“ The Chief looked carelessly at this ribbon,—he was too indifferent to know whether his wife ever had one like it.

“ ‘I have seen no one,’ said another.

“ ‘No trace of any one,’ said a third. And thus answered all of them.

“ ‘Let us still search,’ said the husband, ‘living or dead we must find her. Come! away! The safety of all depends upon it.’

“ He did not finish his commands, something had caught his eye.

“ With one bound he jumped from his horse, and stooping down, picked up an object which he examined.

“‘A handkerchief!’ he exclaimed to the others, ‘a woman’s handkerchief! She whom we seek is not far.’”

“Too bad!” said the Envoy, “since she must lose it, she would have done better not to have taken it.”

“The grass was tall and thick. They began beating it, some with their hands and feet; others with their sabres and pikes; some trampled down the shrubs with their horses’ feet; others cut them with axes to make sure that the fugitive had not found a retreat there.

“But the husband looked toward the large leafy oak-tree.

“‘This foliage is very thick,’ said he, ‘women are all birds. Who knows if my wife has not gone to perch up there?’”

“He took a lance from the hand of one of his men, climbed up on the lowest branches; and, holding himself with one hand, with the other he began to pierce the highest branches with his lance.”

“Poor woman!” said the Envoy, “it is all over with her!”

“What a good thing it was that she had

put on her black dress," said Maroussia; "thanks to this dark colour, her husband could not see her. He pushed the blade of his lance into the heavy foliage, striking at hazard and by choice in the most sombre places. Terrified, mute and motionless, clasping with her contracted arms the branch which served her for support, she gave her soul to the care of God, asking him to make her body invisible.

"Three times the cold iron pierced her flesh; her blood fell like dew. But she did not stir, she was self-possessed, she did not utter a sound, not even an 'Oh.'"

"Your story is heartrending, Maroussia. Ah! the unfortunate woman!"

Maroussia, interested in her story, continued: "Her husband's lieutenant, seeing that all was useless, said to his captain in a rough tone of voice:

"'The time lost by us in this place is clear gain for her whom we seek. The village is very near. The city is not far. If we stay here a quarter of an hour longer, your wife will reach there before we do, Captain. Perhaps she is there now.'

“At the thought that his wife, evidently mistress of his secret, could escape from him, and that his manner of life should be known, a curse burst from his lips.

“‘To horse!’ he cried, ‘to horse, and at full speed.’

“They spurred their horses and started like shots from a cannon. It was time. The poor woman could no longer support herself, she let herself fall at the risk of being killed.”

Maroussia, just then, stepped backward.

“Did you hear it?” she asked.

“It was a shot,” answered the Envoy, “it is the third since we have been walking. But don’t let that trouble you, it is before us and far enough away. In times like these, guns go off alone everywhere. It is not toward us, nor in the direction of your father’s house, that they are shooting.”

“Are you sure?” she asked.

“Very sure. If you hear shots again, don’t pay any attention to them. You must become accustomed to these noises; now return to your story.”

“The poor woman was on the ground. I do not know how many hours she remained

there unconscious," said Maroussia. "When she came to herself the night was no longer so dark, a corner of the sky was already red. The birds were beginning to awake, and the grass wet with dew seemed strewn with white pearls. She still had strength enough to stop the flow of blood from her wounds. She tore her fine skirt in strips to make bandages for herself. Could she walk? She had lost much blood. .

"But she must and she did walk. She went slowly, her arms and side had been cut by the thrusts of the lance: little by little the exercise of itself strengthened her."

"I like this courageous woman," said the Envoy.

"She saw then that she was on a great beaten road; this added to her courage. But in spite of all, she had not gone far when, feeling herself begin to grow weak, by good fortune she heard the sound of wheels.

"A large wagon, loaded with a mountain of hay, listen well to me, was going slowly forward, drawn by two vigorous oxen, with great curved horns. By the side of this wagon an old man walked, singing carelessly a war-song.

"She hastened her footsteps and succeeded in reaching it and its guide.

" 'Save me,' she said to the old man. 'For pity's sake ! I have not strength enough to reach the village on foot.'

"But, at the same time, she heard the voices of the brigands in the distance; they were retracing their steps. Daybreak, without doubt, was forcing them to return home. That kind of people cannot travel by daylight.

" 'I am lost,' she said to the old man. 'These people who are coming are brigands, and my husband is their chief !'

" 'Conceal yourself in the hay,' said the old man, 'and be quiet, if you can. Be quick !'

"What a good old man !" said the Envoy.

" 'Hallo !' cried the chief to the old man, who was walking by the side of his oxen and smoking his pipe ; "did you not meet a young woman on your road who seemed to be running away ?'

" 'A young woman ?' repeated the old man, rubbing his forehead as if to refresh his memory.

" 'Yes, a young woman.'

" 'Well ! A young woman—'

“ ‘Will you answer?’

“ ‘Why not?’

“ ‘Well, then, answer.’

“ ‘I haven’t seen any young woman.’

“ ‘Are you sure of it? Nevertheless, she must have taken the same road as you—’

“ ‘Ah! You understand! I don’t say that she wasn’t there; but that I didn’t see her. My eyes have not been very strong for two years. How can we help it? We grow old and our eyesight fails us.’

“ ‘This old man looks as keen as a fox,’ said the lieutenant; ‘he is making fun of us.’

“ ‘Do you know with whom you are talking?’ the chief asked the old man.

“ ‘How should I know?’ he said. ‘It is the first time that we have ever talked together. Besides, be you what you will, noblemen or brigands, what difference can that make to a poor old man who has nothing?’

“ ‘You have your life,’ said the lieutenant.

“ ‘My life,’ answered the peasant. ‘I am weary of this world. You can judge, then, how pleasant it is to live so long and so painfully.’

“ ‘We will leave you your life, you old talker, but we are going to take your hay.’

“ ‘The hay is not mine. When I tell you that I have nothing, that doesn’t mean that I have a mountain of hay like this to put in my pocket. If you will steal it, do so, but first bruise me a little. If I return without either injuries or hay, the master, who doesn’t joke, will think that I have sold it for drink. I might as well be pounded into a jelly by you as by him.’

“ ‘Queer old fellow!’ said the lieutenant, with difficulty restraining his laughter. ‘We only want enough of your hay to give our horses some breakfast.’

“ ‘Well and good!’ said the old man. ‘But let me help you myself, I will take it in such a way as to show the loss as little as possible. If it can be done without spoiling my load, I can perhaps escape punishment.’

“ ‘Have you enough?’ he asked them, after having taken with care a dozen bundles of hay from his wagon. ‘Indeed a little more and the loss will show. It will be seen and my skin will pay for it. Perhaps, as it is, if the master doesn’t count his bundles, it will pass.’

“ ‘The lieutenant gave a nod of his head as if to say, ‘That is enough,’—and the captain said to the peasant :

“ ‘You can go ; but I have some advice to give you. First, don’t look backward to see what is going on behind you. Second, don’t tell any one of this meeting.’

“ ‘I know how to keep a secret,’ answered the old peasant with an innocent air. ‘I will follow your advice,’ and he gave his oxen the signal to start.

“For about ten minutes, he could hear the gallop of the robbers’ horses. The noise gradually diminished, then could be heard no more.

“ ‘They have re-entered the forest,’ said the old man, as if speaking to himself ; ‘but that isn’t a reason for singing victory yet.’

“The advice was good and was followed. The young woman, buried in the hay, did not move any more than if she had been buried in the ground. A half-hour later, the village, it was more than a village, it was a small city, could be seen. The wagon went the length of a long street as if nothing was the

matter. Soon it entered through a large gate into a court.

“‘Come,’ said the old man, ‘God has helped us, it is done.’

“Thus it was that the wife of the captain of the brigands was saved.

“They took her to the house of people rich and charitable, who cared for her, until her father, undeceived in regard to the imprudent marriage he had made for his daughter, came and took her home.

“They surrounded the forest, hoping to take the brigands in their retreat, but it was too late; the château was deserted when justice arrived there. Feeling themselves in danger of being discovered, they had not dared remain.”

“So much the worse!” said the Envoy, “but the wife was saved, that was the chief thing. By my faith, your story is very interesting, you have done well to relate it to me on our walk. Good stories make the road shorter.”

“If I have told it to you, it was to make it useful to us.”

“I understood it, my child,” said the En-

voy, "understood it well. Ah! we understand each other perfectly.

"Nevertheless," he added, "the white hand with the diamond rings, and the thrusts of the lance in the foliage of the oak-tree, made me shiver."

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT.

It was still night, but the morning breeze could already be felt. From a convent in the distance they could hear the bell for matins; the reeds on the bank of the river waved and rustled; the waters of the river, until now very quiet, meeting rocks which obstructed their way, began to ripple, boil, and dash with a loud noise into a kind of abyss.

“We must turn to the left,” said Maroussia.

Two minutes later they were on the steppe.

They had walked thus far on the bank of the river, most of the time, shaded by the trees which grew on it.

Maroussia and the Envoy, although very hurried, stopped involuntarily to draw a full breath of the invigorating and sweet air of the steppe.

“Look this way,” said Maroussia. “That dark spot yonder is the stable of which I told

you. Now we must turn once more to the left, the oxen are there."

"Let us turn then," said the Envoy.

The steppe spread itself out before them until lost to sight; high stacks of hay, freshly piled, alone attracted attention.

The Envoy mounted upon one of these hay-stacks to examine the horizon.

"Do not stand up!" Maroussia called to him; "you are too tall, they can see you at a distance like a tower."

Everything seemed quiet. The Envoy motioned to Maroussia to come up to him, and wanted to help her climb; but it was unnecessary, in an instant she was beside him.

"You have wings," said the Envoy.

"Father calls me his little squirrel," the child answered with pride.

She looked also, but only in one direction, toward the house of her parents.

"Can you see down there?" she said, "can you see? Look for me, I cannot see very well just now, but it seems to me that everything is quiet."

"Yes, yes," said the Envoy, "everything seems to speak peace."

“ They are sleeping, all those whom I love, after having prayed for us, I am very sure ; let us pray for them.” And the child’s moist eyes were upraised toward heaven.

“ Your father and mother are very happy to have such a child,” said the Envoy.

Calmer, stronger, they came down from the hay-stack ; a few steps more, and they reached, still descending, a hedge surrounding a little valley.

“ Here is the stable,” said Maroussia, “ let us go down a little farther, help me lift up the bar of the door. Here are the oxen, do you see them ?”

“ I see them, they are magnificent !”

The two oxen, lying on the ground, remained motionless like two mountains. Maroussia stroked their horned heads with her little hands. A friendly, gentle low answered the little girl’s caresses.

“ Chut ! chut !” said Maroussia. “ You must follow me very quietly. Be quick !” It was plain that these oxen understood very well the language of their little mistress, for they arose without noise and followed her.

“ They are much larger than I am,” said

Maroussia, laughing, "and yet we are the same age."

The wagon loaded with hay was not very far.

"Now let us yoke them," said Maroussia, when they came near it, and the oxen were soon put to the wagon.

"Be quick! Why do you look at me?"

"Because you are so small," said the Envoy, "so small. One would take you more easily for a little lark, made to fly and sing in the steppe, than for a person having charge of serious affairs."

He was right. The little girl appeared still smaller in the midst of this vast expanse of verdure, by the side of this giant of the Setch.

"Ah! How I wish I were larger!" Maroussia sighed. "Stop! Here is mother's handkerchief. I am going to put it on my head as grown-up people do, then I will seem older. Look! Is it not so?"

Her large eyes shone out from under the brown handkerchief which entirely covered her golden head and little shoulders.

The Envoy looked at her very tenderly and smiled. For a moment he either could not

or would not speak. When he finally spoke, his voice was low, very low, you might have thought that it was not his own.

"You know the road well, Maroussia," he asked her.

"I know it very well. We must go to the right all the time until we reach the little lake; then we turn to the left, and when we have turned, we can see, from the top of a small hill, the roof of Knich's house. Once there we shall have no difficulty in reaching Tchigurine. I heard very clearly when Knich said to my father: "Unless one is an idiot he can go very easily by this route.'"

"Do you know this Knich?"

"I know him, he often comes to our house."

"Will he receive you well?"

"I do not know,—I think so."

"But if he should not?"

"Oh, he will never betray us! It is not possible! He is a friend. Oh, no! A friend of my father can never be a traitor!"

"Do you know, Maroussia," continued the Envoy, looking very steadily at the little girl, "do you know that the country is full of strangers, soldiers, men without mercy? Do

you know that we shall only meet enemies, sabre-cuts, or gun-shots? Do you know that blood is flowing everywhere? Do you know this?"

"Yes," said Maroussia, "I know all this."

"Wicked eyes will watch you, they will ask you questions, every word of which will be a trap to catch you, and, if you answer awkwardly, if you allow a little gesture to escape you, a little motion, if you speak, if you blush, if you tremble a little, all will be lost. Do you know it?"

"Oh! I will not answer awkwardly. I will answer well. I am not afraid."

"It may be, little one, that we are going to our death."

"No!" said Maroussia, "we shall not die until afterward. You must first reach Tchigurine. When you are once there I will die, if it is necessary! Then I shall not be afraid to die. But before that, you must be at Tchigurine! Oh, yes!"

The Envoy said nothing, but took the little girl in his arms and pressed her tenderly to his heart, calling her his "dear little child."

After some moments' silence, he said:

“Maroussia, we shall surely have some trying encounters, the soldiers may stop you, question you. If they come to the wagon, even with the intention of searching it, you will be calm, you will not be like a little partridge who sees some one approaching her nest hidden near by. You understand me?”

“Yes, I understand you. I must be—I must be—like you. I will be so.”

“If any one asks you where you are going, you will answer that you are taking this wagon-load of hay to the house of Knich, who has bought it of your father.”

“Yes, I understand.”

“If we reach Knich’s house safe and sound, Knich will certainly come to the door to meet us. Do you hear?”

“Yes.”

“Then you will say to him: ‘What fine grain you have in your fields! I admired it while passing. It is still a little green, but I think if necessary one could use it, even before it is entirely ripe.’ It is very long, little girl, nevertheless you can remember the words, can you not?”

"Yes," answered Maroussia, "listen, I am going to repeat them to you."

She repeated them, forgetting nothing, not even a word.

"You are a little treasure!" said the Envoy. "Now let us hasten."

He climbed up on the wagon, made a deep hole, and hid himself in the hay.

Maroussia walked as a teamster would have done, encouraging her oxen with her little voice, trembling somewhat at first; and the heavy wagon went forward, moving slowly.

The night, was nearly gone; a few rays of morning light could just be seen. The breeze grew fresher still, and the drops of dew on the dark grass shone with a more vivid brightness.

CHAPTER VI.

AN ENCOUNTER.

OXEN never know how much one is hurried. The wagon advanced too slowly to suit Maroussia; their leisurely steps quickened a little in the midst of the steppe, at the command of their little friend, but they did not go very fast. Their march was cheered by the tranquil light of the last stars, the daylight was just breaking. They could smell the delicious perfume of the flowers.

All was calm; from time to time a gunshot, a call, intended to keep the sentinels on the watch, could be heard plainer still for this great silence. That was to be expected. But every little unexpected noise made Maroussia tremble. How many times the slight murmur of the breeze made all her blood rush to her heart? Ah! It was not for herself she trembled so easily. For what only concerned herself, her little soul was very resolute. Her vigilance was for him. Suddenly she said?

"Hide yourself well! Some one is coming!"

This time they were surely coming. Very soon a detachment of Russian soldiers surrounded the wagon.

"Where are you going? Whence do you come? Who are you?" cried many hoarse voices.

"I am the daughter of Danilo Tchabane," Maroussia answered.

"Stop your oxen!" an officer called to her. She stopped them.

"Whence do you come?"

"I come from home."

"Where is your home?"

"Not very far in that direction."

"Where are you going?"

"I am going to Knich's house."

"Who is Knich?"

"He is a friend of my father. He bought this hay of us and I am taking it to him."

"What did I tell you, my friend? It is a peasant's wagon, nothing more. But you see traitors and escaped prisoners everywhere."

"Do you believe there are none? Is the

galloping that you have just done such a great affair?"

"It is not the first run you have had us make to-day, and always hunting phantoms!" answered the officer. "What shall we do with our capture? Little girl, will you join the regiment? Ah! you are too small, you would have done better not to have come out of your cradle this morning."

"This fine hay," said the first officer, "is not to be disdained." And, speaking to Maroussia:

"Is Knich's house far from here?"

"Far enough."

"What do you mean by that? Shall you reach there with your oxen in one hour, or two?"

"In two or three hours, perhaps."

"Very well! My advice then is, that we escort the wagon to this man's house, if he wishes the hay he shall buy it again. Little girl, is the house of your father's friend very fine? Is he a rich farmer?"

"He has a large garden and many apple-trees."

"Simpleton! What do we care for his

apples! Come on! We will ascertain for ourselves what this Knich is worth. Our visit cannot fail of being an agreeable surprise to him."

The officer spurred his horse and dashed forward. His comrades followed him grumbling.

"You are a perfect idiot! Here is a whole day spent in running about for nothing, what useless trouble you cause us."

"Forward, little girl!" said the soldiers to Maroussia. "Forward!"

The wagon proceeded, surrounded by the detachment of soldiers.

Maroussia saw only forbidding faces all around her. While asking herself with agony what would be the wisest thing to do, to come safely out of this great danger, she timidly examined the stern, dark, implacable faces, bristling with mustaches, which surrounded her.

They all appeared, whilst following her step by step, to be resting themselves after many fatigues and bloody deeds. "How many of our people have these men already killed?" the child said to herself. "Isn't it terrible to think of it? Are they thinking

only of the evil they have done? The faces of some are sad. Their hearts are not all stone, perhaps. And if they should find him? Oh, no! They would have no mercy!"

Maroussia's oxen, though keeping their majestic gravity as usual, animated perhaps by the trampling of the cavalry, and enlivened by the fresh morning breeze, now walked with a little quicker step. The horses of the detachment marched in order, but from time to time, those which were nearest the wagon stretched out their necks and seized, with unspeakable pleasure, a little hay from the bundles which were within the reach of their teeth. This made Maroussia tremble. If a bundle should become loose, if—

Suddenly, Maroussia, glancing around among the soldiers, discovered a pair of eyes which were fixed upon her; they were piercing as the blade of a dagger, and shone like burning coals; they looked at her with great attention, yes, perhaps with a certain mistrust.

She became hot and cold, she thought everything was lost. But she said to herself: "I must be—*like him!*" And she regained her courage.

The two officers rode in front. One was laughing, the other scolding. The soldiers became silent, and, from the slackening of their gait, appeared to sleep.

But why were the eyes of this soldier always fixed upon her?

"I will also look at him," said Maroussia to herself.

And hiding her emotion, she turned her eyes toward him.

The eyes in question belonged to a non-commissioned officer, old, robust, with a very stern but at the same time intelligent face.

Suddenly, he brought his horse forward and placed himself very near Maroussia as if to examine her more closely. He did not speak to her at first, but his keen eyes seemed to say:

"It is very strange, a little girl driving such a large wagon! Who could have chosen this frail toy for a driver? Who could have let her start thus, all alone, in the night, when there is fighting everywhere, and the roads are so unsafe? She wouldn't be a mouthful for a soldier, this little strawberry!"

"Are your father and mother living, little girl?" at last he asked her.

Thinking that Maroussia did not understand Russian, he translated his question as well as he could into Ukrainian.

"Hast thou still thy father? Hast thou still thy mother?"

"Yes, thanks be to God!" answered Maroussia.

"Both of them?"

"Both of them."

He was thoughtful a moment, then his face brightened as if he had suddenly comprehended an enigma.

Maroussia's heart trembled fearfully; she became dizzy. But it was necessary to be—*like him*.

She endeavored to appear calm, and in her turn asked, in a voice it is true trembling a little, but with a smile on her lips:

"And you, have you a father and mother? Have you many relations? Perhaps you have children; have you sons or daughters?"

Was it the little childish voice, trembling and timid, or simply this question, which awakened the remembrance of the joys and sorrows of the past, hidden deep in this soldier's breast? Whatever it might be, the

stern, threatening face, which had so frightened Maroussia, became suddenly transformed, and you could see in it a reflection of all the tender feelings which a human heart contains.

Most certainly he was a strong man, but this reference to the past affected him.

Those eyes which had just been defiant and scrutinizing, became instantly gentle. They now looked at Maroussia with a strange emotion. Did he find any resemblance whatever, in the features of the little girl, to a little creature who was not there, who was far away, perhaps, but the remembrance, only, of whom was sufficient to soften him?

"Yes, I have a little girl," he answered at last.

"Is your little girl large?" asked Maroussia.

He smiled, and you felt that in this sad smile was passing and repassing the image of a very small, delicate creature.

"She is as large as you, yes indeed, quite as large," he answered.

Then he lowered his head and Maroussia dared ask him no more questions. She left him with the image of his daughter.

They were advancing all the time. The air was warm, fresh and perfumed. A rosy streak appeared on the horizon. A little bird, awake very early, gave a faint cry, his good-morning to the break of day.

At the same time, back of the wagon, a sonorous voice arose :

“Remember, remember my beloved, our love of other days !”

It was a young soldier who was singing. His voice and his song were equally harmonious and sweet. Maroussia was deeply impressed by it. But what was her surprise when the soldier who had just been talking with her also began to sing. His voice was sad, a little low and deep, but it moved the depths of the heart. There was a profound silence during the first verse, but at the second, all the soldiers began to sing with him. It was thrilling ! But what astonished and delighted Maroussia most, in spite of the anxiety of her little soul,—perhaps even by its melancholy the song answered these anxieties,—was, that, while the voices which had joined that of her neighbor had acquired a volume which recalled the rumbling of

thunder, the voice of the soldier who had the little girl was never drowned by the voices of the other singers. Among them all, she heard and knew this voice with the sincere accent. When the song was finished, Maroussia noticed that the singer looked very sad.

Not far from the road she saw a little lake with quiet waters and green banks, still partly covered by the morning mist; it seemed like a thin gauze veil disappearing little by little. To the right wound a narrow path, in the shade, which led pedestrians by the shortest road to Knich's house. In the distance a white column of smoke showed the location of the house of her father's friend.

As the daylight was driving away the last shadows of night, Maroussia became restless. The bright morning rays, always so welcome, were, this day, enemies which might betray her! In her fright she had forgotten her favorite singer. Her eyes searched for him without finding him, and she was disappointed.

Involuntarily she had come to count upon his as upon a protector. Another soldier had replaced him at her right.

"How small this child is!" said this soldier to one of his comrades, after having cast a glance on Maroussia.

"No larger than a knot on a silk thread," answered another.

"And she doesn't fear anything, she marches like a colonel of hussars."

"I'll bet she isn't afraid of powder and ball!" continued the first.

"And she is right," added a third. "What ball can be dangerous for a poppy-seed? Is she anything else?"

"I know these Ukrainians," said the first, "and you can't call them a nation of hares. Even the little girls are brave in this country. I have seen, with my own eyes, more than once, of what they are capable; the cannon roars, the musketry rattles, blood flows in streams, the earth trembles, men groan, cry, shout, cut each other's throats and die; and they come even to the battle field, they walk over it gathering up their wounded, as if they were strolling in a garden, gathering wild poppies."

"Hence they die by the thousands."

"Bah! We all die in one way or another,"

answered some one who could be heard without being seen, because he was completely hidden by two giant soldiers. "Yes, in one way or another; the chief thing is to die in a good way."

Several shots were heard.

This noise of fighting drove away, in the twinkling of an eye, every other thought, every other feeling. Reflections scarcely marked out, reasoning begun, opinions half expressed, answers ready to break forth, everything stopped like a thread cut by a pair of scissors; the entire detachment listening intently examined the horizon as one man.

The officers stopped their horses. Each gave his opinion. The musketry recommenced before they agreed.

"It is on our side!" cried the younger. "There is no doubt that it is on our side that the engagement has begun. Forward! They are our soldiers who are fighting."

"Hallo! Ivan! Take the wagon to the house of this Knich, and attend to the sale of the hay, Forward!"

Maroussia had not time enough to recover herself or to collect her thoughts, before the

detachment had disappeared in a cloud of dust. They had flown away like wild birds. But the old soldier who had talked with her and had spoken of his little girl, had turned around, she had seen him, and cast a look of farewell upon her.

Ah ! why, instead of remaining, was he among those to go away ?

Maroussia remained alone with Ivan, who had received the order to conduct her wagon to Knich's house, and to arrange the affair.

"Very well ! Let us start, little drop of honey !" Ivan said to her, lighting his pipe.

Maroussia looked at Ivan and thought to herself that he resembled a hedge-hog.

"Go on ! Go on !" he repeated in a sterner voice.

Maroussia spoke to her oxen. On the sudden departure of their escort they had judged it suitable to stop, such sudden starts do not affect wise oxen. At the command of Maroussia they hastened to obey.

The wagon began again its measured movement ; Maroussia, under the pretext of being tired, perched herself on its top, and while climbing up, managed secretly to press the hand

of her good friend, whose calm and confident face was to be seen in the bottom of the hole which he had made for himself among the bundles of hay. Ivan, of course, was far from suspecting anything. He let her climb up to her place, while he rode by the side of the oxen smoking his pipe and looking before him.

You could see that war had been about them. For one green field with a prospect of harvest, there were ten, entirely devastated.

The volleys of musketry were repeated at less intervals of time, and the shots became more and more distinct.

The wagon was going up one of those small hills which are common in this country and in which are buried the dead of ancient battles.

When they reached the top of the knoll, Maroussia saw many tents in the valley, half veiled by clouds of black smoke, lightened here and there by tongues of red flames. It was the spot upon which the battle was taking place, whence the noise of the musketry had reached their ears.

From time to time, they could hear the shouting and groaning of human beings, and the neighing of horses; the cries of children also came across the fresh morning air, and Maroussia had before her eyes the terrible spectacle of a burning village, the large houses still in flames, while the cottages were in ashes.

Women, with young children in their arms, were running about bewildered; some of them were struck down by straggling shots.

Horses were galloping riderless. Dead men lay here and there. The bodies of wounded strewn the ground. The columns of soldiers, just now very heavy, grew thinner; the number of the living became plainly less; the ground was in large places red with blood; the heavens were darkened.

Alas! it is not for us to explain such horrors.

Beyond, not very far from these abominable scenes, and straight before her, like an oasis appearing through the storm, the little farm of Knich blossomed and perfumed the air.

The wagon gate was open, and Maroussia's

young eyes saw a large number of golden-yellow chickens, who, without noticing the battle, were playing in the court. She saw also the large wagons, the plows with bright plowshares, pitchforks, spades, rakes, and shovels, awaiting the workmen who ordinarily used them.

Near the door was an enormous dog, with his hair standing up like a thatched roof after a great storm and tempest.

Maroussia's wagon had gone around the battle-field, Knich's dog had watched it from afar. It was easy to see from his expectant attitude, that he was prepared to receive the visitor with all the coolness of a creature who in his life has seen, known, and comprehended many things; who makes it a rule to be on the alert, and not to allow himself to go too fast in giving warnings of his fears.

CHAPTER VII.

KNICH'S HOUSE.

THE wagon had scarcely stopped before the door, when a boy, about nine years of age, strong and solid as a tower, red as the dawn, having the look of an eaglet, stepped forward to Maroussia. The determined look of his eyes said: "You are the stranger. It is your business to explain. What do you want?"

"Is Mr. Knich at home?" Maroussia asked.

"Then you have come for grandfather?" said the boy, questioning instead of answering.

"Yes, for your grandfather. Is he at home?"

"He is."

"Where is he?"

"He is in the garden; or may be in the house, or in the field."

"Will you tell him that we have come?"

"And be quick," added Ivan, lighting his pipe.

But the grandfather was already beside them.

He was a good old man, a little bent by

age. He wore the simple dress of the peasant, a shirt and a pair of cloth trousers larger than a gulf of the Black Sea. His head was covered with a broad-brimmed straw hat which he had probably braided himself.

He recognized Maroussia at once and did not seem at all surprised to see her. On the contrary, you would have thought that he was expecting her, and that such a visit was the most natural thing in the world.

"Ah, little girl!" he said. "How do you do? Always well? Always happy? Well, then, come into the house. But if you prefer to stay out of doors, Tarass knows the places where you will find strawberries, and where the raspberries are ripening. We have also other things, a nice supply of goodies, honey-comb, little pies, and large ones too."

Ivan was struck with the mention of pies.

"I see that you have a house, well filled," he said in a voice, still stern, but which the vision of pies had softened a little.

"I give thanks for it to God," the old farmer answered. "Walk in, walk in, I beg of you."

He appeared so simple, courteous, and unaffected, this good old man Knich.

"Come in, come in," he continued, "come in then. What a pleasure! What an agreeable surprise! What a godsend! I like all soldiers! Come in, come in, Mr. Soldier, I beg of you."

The soldier whom he liked so much, was exhausted with fatigue and hungry as a wolf, therefore he followed the old farmer without waiting to be urged, and, once in the room, dropped into a seat, gaping, stretching out his arms, extending his legs, in a word, improving the happy chance which allowed him to rest a little his poor body, all bruised by the hardships of war.

It was plain that he took old Knich for a worthy man, very simple and ignorant; and one, to tell the truth, who only thought of his pies; as to the matter of the hay, that would come in its turn.

Maroussia at first occupied herself with getting the large wagon into the court. Little Tarras, very important, jumping about, helped her. When this was done, she went to rejoin the two men.

"Mr. Knich," said Maroussia, "*what fine grain you have in your fields! I admired it*

passing by. It is still a little green, but I think one could use it, if necessary, even before it is entirely ripe."

"God be praised, my little child! God be praised! Yes, we shall have a good harvest!" answered old Knich.

His calm voice betrayed not the least emotion. He trotted about in the room, calling his servants, giving his orders in a cheerful voice. He was a worthy man, proud of his pies and his hams, smiling in advance at the thought of the welcome which the stranger would give to the repast that he was preparing for him.

"Has he understood me?" Maroussia asked herself. "No, he has not! Nevertheless—" and her heart stood still,—“if he did not understand!”

She did not know what to think, what to do.

"I must be like him," she said at last to herself. "I must be brave, know how to be silent and to wait."

She understood that the Envoy had given proof of all these qualities, in not jumping from the wagon on the way, when he had seen his escort reduced to one soldier, this Ivan, of

whom he would have made only a mouthful, and in still remaining in it after it's entrance into the court. Therefore, having taken this resolution to be like him, she asked no questions of the old man, but trotted about after him.

His cottage was large. The furniture was composed of seats of solid oak. Upon the walls, whitened as white as snow, strings of dried herbs filled the air with the fragrance of the wild flora of the steppe.

In a corner, the pictures of God and the Saints were ornamented with fresh flowers. In the middle of the room, a large, massive table, also of oak, was covered with a white table-cloth with colored fringe.

Old Knich invited his guest to be seated.

"I musn't forget the refreshments," he said. "They will soon be ready, they will soon be ready." And, running from one place to another, he brings large glasses, goes down into the cellar, climbs up into the attic, opens the pantry door, drops the spoons, empties one bottle into another, gets down the smoked sausages and runs to the garden, &c.

All these preparations, which promised much

to the famished soldier, kept him in continual anticipation. He expected every moment to see some superb dish appear, he smelled the odor in the air, his mouth watered, he had all the interest and anxiety of the glutton. He promised himself such a repast, that he forgot all the world, or rather he saw the world confusedly through the heaps of pies, sausages, cheese, meats and other dainties.

"Listen, then, listen, old man, don't give yourself trouble. I will be content with little. I mean, I will be satisfied with what I see there. Yes, I will be satisfied."

"No, no!" answered old Knich. "No! Allow me to give you something suitable! Allow me, sir, may I ask your name?"

"I am called Ivan," the soldier answered with a sigh, but completely disarmed by the frank hospitality of the old farmer.

"Very well, sir, Mr. Ivan, I must be allowed to present you with the best there is in my poor little house! I must! I must! You do not wish to disappoint an old man, do you? You will taste a little of my sausages, and of my hams also, and then of my cheese, you will see."

"But we soldiers are not accustomed to these delicacies. If our hunger can be appeased, we are satisfied."

"Certainly, certainly, sir, Mr. Ivan, certainly! Oh, the soldier's life is hard! I have heard about it. Very well, all the more reason to feast you a little. Yes, yes, believe me."

Maroussia, seated in a corner, tried to be as he would have been, of whom she was thinking all the time. She appeared calm, but what an ebb and flow of hope and anxiety. It cannot be described. Was her good friend still buried in the hay? Or, on the contrary, had he been able to escape from it? But, if so, could he hide himself in a safe place? And besides, if he had been obliged to leave the house, where would she find him? What risks he must run! What would her father say, if she became separated from him before having led him to his destination?

Little Tarass, after having examined the new-comers, approached the window and counted the shots, which could be heard distinctly, although they were very far away.

At last the breakfast was ready. Mr. Ivan

began to devour it with a sort of rage. He had waited for it too long.

At the first mouthful, he had the stern look of a warrior who did not wish to tickle his palate, but very soon his face began to soften, and gradually it brightened until it shone. After several small glasses of wine, made of raspberries, strawberries and cherries, his eyes had an amiable expression and a happy smile appeared on his lips.

Old Knich did not stop presenting new dishes and new drinks to him. From time to time he gave a little exclamation.

"Ah! what an idea! I remember that I have something in my pantry that will please you. Wait, wait! With your permission, I am going to bring it to you, Mr. Ivan. You will give me your opinion."

Mr. Ivan did not resist. He could only shake his head a little, as if to say:

"That will please me. But everything pleases me just now."

"Very well; Tarass, what are you doing?" asked old Knich, after having placed a new bottle before his guest. "Is this the time to stand gaping there? In your place, I should

have gone to see if it was time to feed the oxen."

"Do you know, Mr. Ivan, I have a good workman in Tarass! He is a little boy who is not at all foolish or idle."

Mr. Ivan wished to reply, but he could only give a smile which did not say much. As to Tarass, he did not wait to be urged. With one bound he was near the door.

It was time! Maroussia could not control herself any longer. She arose, and said quietly to old Knich:

"I will go with Tarass."

"Go, my little child, go," answered the old man.

And, when she passed near him, he stretched out his hand and gently stroked her hair.

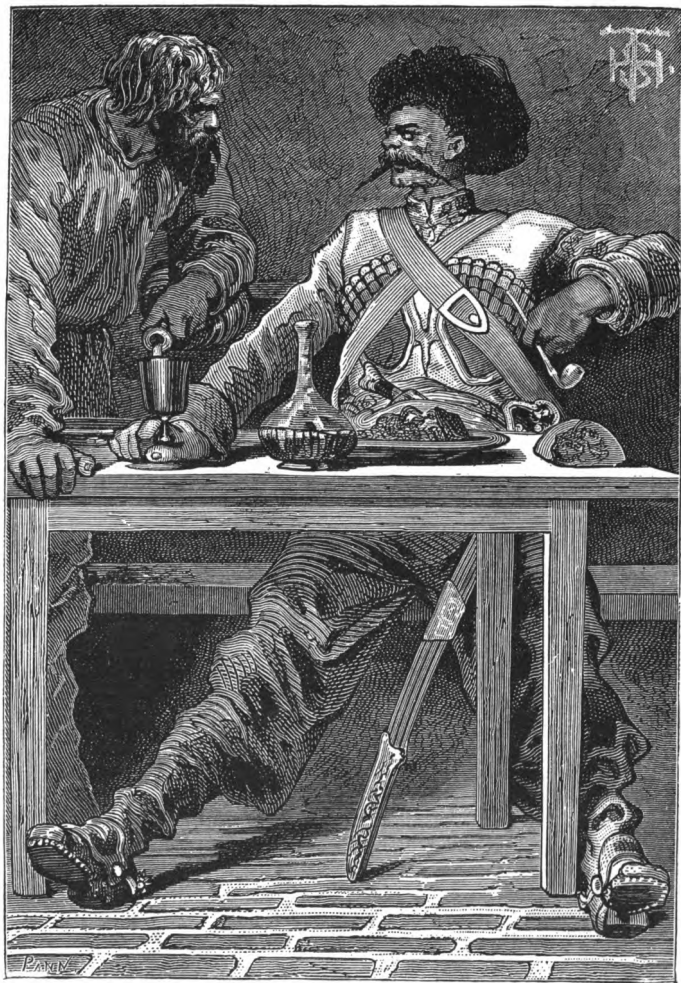
This caress was a little thing, but, as if by magic, it restored full confidence to Maroussia; she felt herself reassured and comforted, her anxiety disappeared, her poor heart, until then as if within the grasp of a vice, was freed from pain.

"Very dear sir," said Ivan, making a desperate effort to collect his thoughts; "this

hay just now, you know, the hay in the wagon which I was ordered to escort, is ours ! You understand me ? We captured it, hence it is ours, it becomes our property ! It is clear, is it not ? But if you want to keep it, you can pay me the price. Give me the money, much money, and you may have it ! And that will be all right, on the honor of an honest man ! ”

“ You are the master, Mr. Ivan,” answered old Knich ; “ you are absolutely the master. You can take all you want. You are the master ! ”

“ That is well ! That is very well ! ” answered Ivan. “ Very well indeed ! ”



"THAT IS VERY WELL," ANSWERED IVAN.

Marousia, Page 110.

CHAPTER VIII.

AT THE SAME PLACE.

GOING into the court, Maroussia saw her wagon still filled with hay, at the same place where she had left it. Tarass was working with great zeal. He climbed up on the wheel, pulled out the hay by the handfuls from the bundles which he could reach, and gave it to the oxen, that accepted the offering with great dignity.

Maroussia fluttered around the wagon like a wounded bird.

Tarass, having fed the beasts, began to talk and asked several questions of the new-comer.

But Maroussia, entirely occupied with her own thoughts, answered him only with monosyllables.

Suddenly, the idea struck her that her presence near the wagon might seem strange, and she went quickly away. She walked about in the large court, she penetrated into the bushy garden, she stood still, looked

about her and contemplated the fields which spread out in the distance.

"What is to be done?" she asked herself. "What will become of him? How can I save him? How free him? Nothing is changed in the look of the wagon; can he still be—"

She walked about in the court to assure herself that no one was watching her. "If I can without imprudence," she said to herself, "I will try, if not to call him, at least, by some means to attract his attention."

Suddenly, while passing by a heap of large stones, piled up against a wall in ruins, she thought she heard, no, she heard very distinctly, as if it came out of the earth, the voice she knew so well, and it said to her :

"Thanks, my little Maroussia! Be easy, every thing is all right!"

She could not doubt, it was the voice, the very voice of him for whom she thought she still must tremble. Struck with joy as with an arrow, she dropped on the ground, incapable of taking another step. Gradually she collected her thoughts and tried to see from what place this voice came that she was so happy to hear.

The heap of stones near which she found herself seemed very old. It was covered with moss, wild herbs, and running plants, with little yellow flowers which shone like stars in the sunlight. Evidently these stones had been placed there a long time ago, under a building which had almost entirely disappeared, whose cellar window her searching eye discovered, although it was scarcely visible through the mass of plants which obstructed it.

"Have I indeed heard him?" Maroussia asked herself.

Her poor heart was ready to burst. But the voice coming again through the rubbish, could be heard a second time :

"My faithful friend," said the voice, "take courage. We have passed through the storm, we will not be wrecked in port, I hope."

Maroussia stood motionless, she was still listening, although everything was quiet.

These few words coming from her good friend, were like so many magic words, and drove away all her fears.

Her heart was filled with joy, her cheeks were covered with such a rosy color, her eyes

shone with such brightness, that Tarass, who was prancing in the court like the most fiery steed of the Ataman, or fighting like the Ataman himself, against some invisible enemy, interrupted his exercises and came to place himself in front of the little girl.

Struck forcibly with the great change in her appearance, he looked at her with a curious eye.

"Surely she is well pleased, grandfather must have given her something very good," he thought. But what was it? Was it gingerbread, or roasted filberts?

And the more he looked at her, the more his excited imagination was carried away by fantastic suppositions of marvelous goodies. This idea took more and more hold of him. Hesitating, watchful, nursing some vague hope, he stood there, recalling more than ever the type of an eaglet, who flutters his wings, stretches his beak, and with his piercing eyes tries to perceive the prey.

Maroussia said to him :

"Should you like to go into the garden?"

"I should like it very much," he answered, with some hesitation, like a boy who is not

sure, in giving his consent, whether he is going to lose or win. "But tell me, what has grandfather given you?"

"To whom has he given?"

"To you."

"He has given me nothing."

"Very well! He has promised you something, it is the same as if you had it. What has he promised you?"

"He has promised me nothing."

Tarass looked at her with distrust.

"Why then are you so pleased?" he asked her.

"I?"

"Yes, you."

She wanted to say, "I am not pleased"; but she could not lie, even for a good cause, and only uttered these words:

"Let us go into the garden."

"I am going," Tarass said with a cross look.

"Shall we find many strawberries?" asked Maroussia.

"I find them when I look for them," Tarass answered with dignity.

"I will try also to find some, do you think that I shall succeed?"

"May be. It is not very difficult. It is suitable work for a little girl! If a mole had to be captured, or a hedgehog caught, that would be a very different thing!"

And, walking along the side of the garden, Tarass swung himself with a lofty air, suitable to a catcher of moles and hedge-hogs.

"Little girls have no courage, that is my opinion," he added. "Boys—"

"Ah! Boys are very brave!" said Maroussia, seeing that her little companion was searching for a word which would worthily represent the greater merit of boys.

"That is it!" Tarass answered, touched by the esteem which the little girl entertained for boys; and to himself he said: "She is not as silly as I thought."

"They know how to ride horses, boys do!" he continued. "It is astonishing how they are able to conquer the wildest horses."

"Truly it is wonderful," said Maroussia, smiling.

"Some time you will see if I know how to ride our mare! The other day when I went galloping past old Hanna's cottage, I gave her a great fright; the poor woman thought

it was a Tartar's arrow! You know our old women are very much afraid of the Tartars."

"Poor old women!" said Maroussia.

"But you musn't be afraid, I will defend you," he said with a burst of generosity.

"Thank you," replied Maroussia.

"Oh! You can be easy! You must know that I laugh at all danger. A day will come, soon perhaps, when I shall cut in pieces all the enemies of our Ukraine! Will you go in by this little gate? Come this way, the strawberries are on this side. Do you know my plan? You don't know it?"

"No, tell it to me."

"Very well, my plan is to fall on a camp of Tartars or of Turks, to kill them and to take their chiefs prisoners. What do you say to that?"

"It would be glorious," Maroussia answered seriously.

"Glorious! Wouldn't it? There was once a shepherd girl in France, who drove away all their enemies."

"Oh!" exclaimed Maroussia, whose eyes shone like stars. "How happy she must have been!"

"She was burned at the stake," continued Tarass.

"Nevertheless she was the happiest of women," said Maroussia.

"Grandfather will tell you her story if you wish. A French lady told it to him in the city. We don't know those stories here. This girl's name was Jeanne d'Arc."

"Jeanne d'Arc!" Maroussia said with her eyes full of tears. "Jeanne d'Arc! Happy girl!"

Tarass' tongue was started. That which a French girl had done a Ukrainian boy could not fail to do. He confided to Maroussia a multitude of plans which were seething in his little brain. How happily all these glorious projects ended, in his imagination at least! All the good fortune was on his side! While walking in the garden, he explained his ideas concerning the last battle, and regretted very much that the Ataman had been too slow in his attack.

Maroussia listened to him in silence, thinking of this girl, whose name had just been revealed to her, and who had freed her country.

"This little Maroussia has decidedly some

intellect," Tarass said to himself, "how she listens to me! I am very glad that she doesn't resemble that silly, scolding Mimofka, who always wants to be first, who pretends to teach me this, that, and the other. Mimofka is very disagreeable to me! But Maroussia is a good girl. And very soon I am going to gather some strawberries for her."

In the meantime, Tarass, leaning on the gate, could not help saying to himself, while looking at Maroussia :

"But how her face brightens! How happy she seems! She could not be more so if she saw all the dainties of the fair spread out before her! I am sure that she has concealed somewhere a quantity of ginger-bread! Nevertheless, she is a very good child, she will share with me! One is never glad without a reason, she surely has some famous morsel in a corner, or she knows she is going to have it! She will soon tell me her secret, and I shall have the half of what she has, perhaps more."

CHAPTER IX.

IVAN WAKES UP.

It was almost noon, there was no shade; if a little spot could be found under a bushy tree, the warm rays of the sun passing between the leaves, under the old cherry-tree of the court, soon found it out. A golden cobweb swung at each breath of the wind which moved the foliage.

For some time, a burning ray had penetrated the window, near which Ivan was sleeping after his copious repast, and had fallen directly on his cheek. His face was very red under the sun's heat. He felt vaguely that he was being burned, but he was so happy in his sleep that he did not wish to awake. "If I open my eyes," he said to himself, half asleep, "if I change my place, all this happiness is ended, I shall sleep no more." A plaintive smile, trembling on his lips, helped one to decipher his thoughts.

Nevertheless, he suddenly gave a jump as if

he had been touched with a hot iron. The truth is, his cheek was on fire. He put his hand on it and drew it away as if burned by the contact.

He withdrew from the window ; his sleepy eyes glanced around the interior of the room ; mechanically he rearranged his uniform and his face struggled to assume its usual expression of indifference.

Where was he ? Gradually his memory returned to him. His wicked eyes examined even the white walls of the cottage. The house was indeed empty ! He was alone ; why ? Bah ! Old Knich had probably gone away in order to allow his guest to sleep more comfortably.

But how long had he slept ? He became uneasy. He began calling, his voice was not remarkable for softness, it was hoarse and loud, and gave sudden bursts like the crashing of broken branches. His cries were soon heard in all the corners of the court.

"Hallo ! Hallo ! Old man ! Thunder ! Will you come ?"

Maroussia and little Tarass, hearing him, ran toward the house, but, thinking it useless

to brave such a terrible awakening, hid themselves behind a clump of lilies and listened.

When Ivan was silent, nothing could be heard except the sweet murmuring of a beautiful summer day, when all nature is expanding, every little leaf breathing, and the very blades of grass seem to tremble with happiness.

When the soldier began calling again there was no more quiet. A thousand demons could not have made more noise.

“Where is that cursed old man?”

Ivan felt that he was belated; with a violent kick he opened the door, and, sabre in hand, he appeared on the door sill, turning his head alternatively from right to left, like a man undecided in which direction to strike.

“May the devil fly away with me, if I know which way to turn,” the angry soldier cried at last.

He ran rapidly around the court, cutting the air with his sabre, striking the wall here, a tree there, with the look of a man who would not be sorry to find something to cleave in two. At last he stumbled on the heap of stones near the cellar; it made Maroussia grow

pale in her hiding-place, but he arose swearing, and finally returned furious to the point of his departure, before the door of the house.

In the mean time, the feeble voice of old Knich, broken by a little dry cough, was heard ; he came with short, quick steps, like a man distressed to have kept a person of importance waiting.

"I am coming, my dear sir, I am coming," he said with good-nature and affability ; "I am entirely at your service."

Ivan heard old Knich's voice very plainly, but he could not satisfy himself from what point it came.

"Where the deuce are you ?" he cried.

"I am here," answered old Knich.

"Here ! Where ?" roared the soldier.

"Before you, Soldier ; don't you see me ?"

And the truth is, Ivan found himself in front of old Knich, who was looking in the eyes of the angry soldier with almost paternal anxiety.

"The flies didn't bite you too much, I hope. I closed the windows so that they might leave you in more quiet."

"May the fires of heaven roast your flies,

"I laugh at them!" answered Ivan; "they would have done better to have waked me sooner, do you hear?"

After having drank too much, eaten too much, and slept too long, the soldier did not feel very much at his ease.

"I think as you do, sir, just as you do," replied old Knich.

And as Ivan, becoming very thoughtful, pulled his long mustaches with an angry air, the old man thought best to reflect a little. He waited a minute, then :

"Nevertheless, sir, I acknowledge to you that when we are once asleep, we don't like to be waked up by the flies ; I acknowledge it frankly. When we think that a worthy man, even a soldier, a man brave by his calling, can no more than any one else protect himself from this annoyance."

"What annoyance?" Ivan asked, as if awakened anew.

"Why, the flies, sir. When we think that these insupportable insects light indifferently on a general, a peasant, or a drop of honey, we ask ourselves of what use is difference of profession or merit."

Ivan interrupted him.

"I have a headache," he said ; "in place of talking, you would do better to bring me a glass of brandy."

"Oh ! With pleasure, sir, with the greatest pleasure," old Knich exclaimed. "What happiness to be able to serve you, sir, what happiness—"

Seeing his delighted face, one might ask whether he did not think himself too happy, in being able once more to wait upon the soldier.

He ran to the sideboard, proud as a king. Ivan followed him.

The soldier kept his savage look, but he began to lift up his mustaches like one who expects something good,

"Seat yourself there, sir, seat yourself there," said the old man. "I am just going to fill this little glass—be seated, be seated."

"I haven't time to sit down," Ivan answered, insensible to the courtesy of the old man ; "give it to me quickly, I will drink it standing. Have you the money ready ? I am in a hurry, I must fly—"

"You are hurried, sir ? What a pity ? This is brandy such as we find little of now—"

adays ; and, if you were not in a hurry, you could enjoy it as it deserves. I will tell you, sir—”

“ Have you the money ready ? ”

“ I have it ready, sir, at your service ; but it is hard for us poor people—”

The old man gave a sigh and looked with sadness on a leather bag which he drew from his pocket.

“ Of what use is this talk ? ” Ivan said to him, while swallowing an enormous glass of Knich’s brandy, as if it had been a drop of sweetened milk.

Old Knich gave another sigh, but this time it was a sigh big enough to overturn an oak-tree. However, he argued no more, and having drawn a handful of coppers from the money bag, he began to count it piece by piece, while arranging the money symmetrically on the table.

“ Let us see, can you count three ? ” Asked the soldier of the peasant.

One couldn’t certainly affirm that this question was asked with kindness, but the tone of voice was not stern, he rather had the intention of being witty ; for, while asking, he had

poured himself out another glass of brandy, and it was not anger that usually accompanied such an action with him. Doubtless finding his pleasantry agreeable, "I ask you" he said, still with a joking air, "if you can count three. How do you count? Let us see."

"You shall see, sir," Knich answered. "Five, six—it is the best way of counting, I think—seven, eight—my dead father, may he rest in peace, always counted this way—nine, ten—and he counted so well that the most skillful could never succeed in cheating him—eleven, twelve."

Ivan let him talk ; only, with an absent air, he poured himself out a third bumper, and while he enjoyed it he listened silently to Knich's reflections on the customs of the Polish money-lenders, and their capacity for business.

Gradually the heaps of coppers were arranged and the bag was empty.

Ivan poured himself out a fourth bumper, swallowed it at one gulp, and, this done, he seemed to Knich more savage than ever. His forehead was covered with wrinkles

which promised nothing good ; his face was darkened by threatening frowns. He replied not a word to the affectionate farewell of the old farmer. Much, indeed, he cared for the politeness of the poor man !

He counted the money given him with a severe air, put it in his pocket, went out with a quick step, unhitched his horse, which was quietly eating oats, struck the poor beast a blow with his fist, called it a glutton, jumped on it, deigned to lift up a little bit the visor of his cap in response to the many salutes of Knich, pulled it down again on his eyebrows with a terrible look, and disappeared in the steppe, and the waves of the green sea closed again behind the horse and his rider.

“ A good journey ! ” murmured old Knich.

CHAPTER X.

THE REAL KNICH.

WHILE the piercing eyes of Tarass followed Ivan galloping away over the high grass, Maroussia's glances were turned toward the old farmer.

Old Knich stood near the wagon gate and seemed to watch his guest disappear without concealing his joy. It might have been said that it simply gave him pleasure, as it did little Tarass, to witness the rapid course and to hear the neighing of the noble horse which bore away the soldier. With one hand the old farmer patted his dog, which approached him wagging his tail in congratulation, no doubt, and shaded his eyes with the other to protect them from the ardent rays of the sun.

Having looked thus for some minutes, which seemed very long to Maroussia, he turned his steps toward the cottage. He went quietly without hurrying, glancing from one side to another with the look of an economical and watchful owner, who is careful to re-

pair the accidental disorder which has happened in his home.

"Grandfather," cried Tarass, who ran after him, "tell me, then, where the enemy is camping. I think indeed that they are at Véluka-Jarouga, but—"

"Ah! You are there my children!" said the old farmer in an affectionate tone of voice.

He stopped, shaking his head with good-humor.

"Have you amused yourselves in the garden? Are you tired? Are you hungry? Very well! Come, come, they will give you some good things, the soldier did not eat everything. Follow me, be quick."

And he walked before them, a pleasant smile on his face, coughing sometimes, like a good old man. Tarass and Maroussia trotted after him. In the twinkling of an eye, the bottle and glass which had been used by the soldier were carried away by Maroussia. A window was opened, the pure air was coming in, and the disagreeable and penetrating smell of brandy was replaced by the tempting odor of a warm pie. A nice bowl of cream was placed on one side for the dessert.

Tarass, though very anxious to know the exact spot where the enemy was encamped, did not allow his appetite to be affected. He ate like a little wolf. The morsels of food disappeared in his mouth as if by enchantment; it seemed as if he did not swallow them, but that he threw them behind him.

But Maroussia ate little; while her delicate little fingers broke the biscuit, she could hardly keep her eyes off old Knich's face.

"Grandfather! Listen to me, grandfather," cried Tarass, who was no longer hungry; "if this soldier gallops toward Stary-Kresty, that means that the enemy is no longer encamped at Vélika-Jarouga. Doesn't it, grandfather?"

"I presume so, my child, I presume so," replied the amiable, indulgent grandfather, still offering some dainties to the children. "Now I think of it, you recall something else to my mind; you must see what has become of those fishing-nets that we set the other day, at the place where you advised me. It may be that we have already caught some magnificent trout, what do you think?"

"I had entirely forgotten those nets,"

Tarass exclaimed ; "yes, entirely forgotten them!"

"Ah! Ha! Careless boy," Knich said to him, smiling.

"Do you know, grandfather? I don't at all understand how I could have forgotten them!"

With a jump he was in the middle of the room, and stood there before the old grandfather, his eyes wide open, his lips pressed tight together, looking like a grave personage, who suddenly finds himself in an equivocal position, little in keeping with his habits of order and punctuality.

"I am going, I will run there!" he said at last, and, rushing out of the door, nothing more was heard of him, except his voice calling Riabko, his dog.

Then, everything was silent. Maroussia was at last alone with the old farmer. He looked at her attentively, he examined her so closely that her heart began to beat like a little hammer.

Before her eyes a sudden change took place in the whole person of Knich. The old peasant was transformed. Instead of the face of a

worthy old man, a little cowardly, a little proud of his good things to eat and drink, and of his worldly prosperity, she saw brilliant eyes, with piercing glances, shining under his eyebrows; all the wrinkles on his forehead had disappeared as if by magic. The whole man had grown larger. His shoulders were broader, his height truly imposing.

For a few moments Maroussia looked at Knich like a little fascinated bird. He spoke. His voice resembled the voice which had just now made complaisant speeches to the soldier no more than the violin of a master resembles the fiddle of a poor, blind beggar.

He said to her :

“ Maroussia, your friend wishes to see you. He is not far. Do you wish to know what he has to say to you ? ”

Her eyes answered for her, joy had deprived her of speech, but Knich understood and made her a sign to follow him.

He went out, walking with a firm step into the court. Maroussia's eyes glanced to the side of the old cellar, for the heap of stones covered with moss and wild plants, whence

her friend's voice had reached her, but Knich did not go to that place.

After having looked carefully all around, Knich whistled. The large dog Corbeau, who was standing near the wagon-gate, approached his master in two bounds, seated himself on his hind-legs, fixed his intelligent eyes on the farmer and waited.

"There's no stranger in the neighborhood, Corbeau?" said Knich to the faithful guardian of his house.

Corbeau barked gently, in a peculiar manner, which clearly said to his master: "Be easy." And, as a proof that everything was in truth perfectly quite outside, and consequently that one could be at his ease within, Corbeau began to chase flies. Evidently he would not have amused himself in this manner if any danger had threatened the house.

Knich, reassured, returned with Maroussia into the cottage, but, on entering the little vestibule, he passed the door to the right which led into the room where they had breakfasted, and opened a door at the left which communicated with the pantry.

This pantry was full of all kinds of food

used by country people. They could hardly pass between the large bags of flour, oatmeal, rye meal, dried peas and beans.

The windows were large enough, but light scarcely penetrated them. A supply of hops, sausages, dried prunes, cherries in glass jars, apples, pears, pyramids of eggs, and bottles, were piled up before the windows and obstructed the view.

Maroussia stopped on the door-sill, hesitating, for the room was so full that it seemed impossible to pass through it.

"Come to the left," Knich said to her, and, lifting up a barrel filled with brandy in his robust arms, he pressed with his foot on the floor, which opened, and disclosed to Maroussia a little stairway which seemed to lead to an underground place.

"Go slowly, little girl," said Knich, "watch your steps, perhaps it is a little slippery."

CHAPTER XI.

THEY SEE EACH OTHER AGAIN.

THEY began to descend this narrow little stairway, which shook and trembled beneath them.

Maroussia paid no attention to the way in which the floor had opened. She did not know that it was closed until she found herself in darkness; the farther they descended the colder the air became. The sun had never penetrated this deep cellar.

The little girl felt a firm strong hand supporting her in the difficult places. Finally they reached the last step.

Knich then took her by the hand, and they began to walk, following a corridor which was dark for a hundred steps. At a turn, daylight penetrated from above and lighted this underground passage, which was here enlarged into a circular place. The Envoy was walking there with slow steps. His eyes were at once turned toward the visitors.

Warned by the sound of their steps, he awaited them.

"Maroussia, my kind adviser!" he said, stooping toward the child, "how happy I am to see you again, and to be able to thank you!"

Maroussia, much excited, rushed into his arms. "Ah!" she said, "how you must have suffered in the hay, at the noise of the battle, when the soldiers came, and on the way when Ivan was going around the wagon, and again just now when he missed falling headlong very near this cave."

"I remembered the story of the brigand's wife," answered the Envoy, "but I feared for my guide."

Old Knich turned around to wipe away the tears from his eyes. This embrace of the strong man and the feeble child, showed him that the delicate little girl had already become a dear and sacred person to the brave warrior.

"If Tarass were a little taller," he said to himself, "would he be worth as much to me as this little girl is to the Envoy?"

"Let us go a little farther," said Knich, "we shall be safer."

They went on several hundred steps in the underground passage, which sometimes was exceedingly narrow, sometimes became quite wide. They passed through alternations of light and darkness. Wherever the light penetrated could be seen little stairways, leading to well-concealed outlets, which allowed the occupants of this underground retreat to keep themselves well informed of what was taking place in the court and garden.

"We are not rich in time," said Knich to him whom he called Tchetchevik.

"We must not then be poor in expedients," Tchetchevik answered.

"Well, then, choose," said Knich, and he pointed out to him an excavation of the passage which almost made him think of the room filled with clothing, arms, and vestments discovered by the brigand's wife in the cellar of the château.

Tchetchevik stooped down ; from a heap of all sorts of costumes, strange vestments, cowls, uniforms worn or torn, some by bullets, he drew out a great white beard and a strange suit of clothes, which seemed to have belonged

to some wandering minstrel. By the side was a *théorbe*, of an old and rare shape, still well preserved. Nothing was wanting to the disguise; the wig, the mustaches, even the eyebrows were in perfect accord with the beard.

"This is just what I want," he said gaily. "Now let us look for what will best suit Maroussia."

"Does Maroussia go with you?" asked Knich, shaking an old mantle.

At this question, which seemed to make doubtful her duty of following the Envoy everywhere, until the end of his journey was attained, Maroussia's face, ordinarily so gentle, showed an expression of anger and indignation struggling together.

"What will my father say? What will my mother say? And what will he himself say," pointing to Tchetchevik, "if I do the half only of my duty?"

"But, do you know, little girl, where he is going?" asked Knich. "Do you know that he is going where you may be killed, and that it is not probable that you will return safe and sound?"

"Isn't it just for this reason that I should

be a coward to leave him," answered the child, red with shame.

"Ah! brave girl!" Knich cried. "Wait, I must embrace you. May God grant that my Tarass shall resemble you!"

"If Tarass were as old as I am, he would do what I am doing. Isn't he all the time thinking, the little fellow, of killing all the enemies of Ukraine?"

"It is true, by my faith, it is true!" Knich said. "Already he only thinks of that."

The Envoy was searching, searching among the costumes. He wished a disguise for Maroussia; nothing pleased him, he rejected everything.

"They are so becoming to her, these pretty clothes which she has on, what a pity that she cannot be allowed to wear them! This is frightful," he said, "and this more frightful still!"

He examined one by one the poor costumes which were the right size for the little girl, and threw them on one side.

"It is not necessary either that she should look like a beggar," he said to himself. He had just thrown back on the heap a costume

all in rags, which could only have belonged to some unfortunate little girl, begging her bread from the charity of strangers. Maroussia picked it up again.

"It is necessary for me to look like a beggar," she said. "It will be necessary, perhaps, for me to be a beggar. I choose this dress. These rags suit me."

She ran to a dark corner, stripped herself of her pretty dress, and in a few moments, the rich farmer's little daughter came back dressed like a beggar-girl. But what a noble mien she still had under her rags, how radiant were her glances, and what joy was in her heart!

"Ah! little girl," Knich said to her, "you look like a princess in disguise, you must change your eyes also. The eyes of a beggar, where will you get them?"

"Poverty will give them to me," she said. "Who knows if we are not going to suffer a little from hunger?"

During this time the transformation of the child was completed.

"What a handsome old man!" said Knich. "He is your grandfather, Maroussia."

"He is the friend of Ukraine," said the child; "let us go."

Already she saw herself in Tchigurine, begging at the palace door of the great Ataman, and watching while her friend was attending to business.

The two men withdrew into a corner. They were giving each other information of the state of affairs. Knich, interrogated, answered the short, laconic questions of Tchetchevik.

His answers were not very reassuring.

"Things are unsettled," he said, "in short, division is everywhere and destroys any united action. People do not agree as to the means to be employed, still less on the men. Self-love is in the way. The women are worth more than we, in truth. You will find them everywhere ready to say: Give back Ukraine to the Ukrainians, and quarrel afterward if you wish, but not before. That is what our women say to us. They are a hundred times right. We have two Atamans, the one a great lord, the other a friend of the people. They are jealous of each other, distrust makes them rivals. It seems as if they wished to destroy each other. The Russians,

Poles and Tartars excite these jealousies, which are useful to themselves only. Blessed be he who can put concord in the place of these unbridled passions!"

"They say that our Ataman is not well. Is it true?"

"He has grown old, he has changed very much. The crab has not only pain and sorrow, a too near approach to the fire gives it a beautiful color."

"And the other?"

"Of the other, you hear only evil."

"Are none of our friends near him?"

"Yes, Anton is there, but the Ataman's only desire is to get rid of him. He says that it is an unpleasant occupation to watch such a rascal. In case you wish to visit this vulture, remember that his wife is a very good woman. It is among thorns that this rose has flourished. She is a noble lady, and her heart beats true. She has a sister who is almost an angel, and who will surely, one day or another, be a saint among the martyrs in the great calendar of God."

"Then," said Tchetchevik, "is our Ataman discouraged?"

"He is."

"Who are his counselors?"

"No one, he remains alone like a wounded eagle."

"Never mind," said the old minstrel, drawing himself up to his full height, "I must see all this nearer. I am going to all, to all of them! And if God will help me, I will unite these scattered forces."

Maroussia approached Knich, and fixing upon him the gentlest of eyes :

"I have a service to ask of you," she said.

"Speak, little one."

She took him by the hand. She tried to speak, but with her heart running over, she could at first say only :

"You will say to my venerated father—You will say to my beloved mother—"

Welcome tears had come. They flowed softly from her eyes. The two men, much moved by her emotion, allowed her time to calm herself.

At last, with a great effort, she began in a stronger voice :

"Say to them that if Maroussia should never see them again, it will be because she is



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dead, and that she will die thinking of them, of her little brothers and sisters, also—of them and of Ukraine—and of him whose daughter they made her for this time of trial. I kiss my father's hand in kissing yours, father Knich, and say farewell and thank you."

"Ah, dear little girl," said the old peasant, "may God be with you! But you will never be in your right place until you are in His paradise."

If Tchetchevik had been the father of his little companion, he could not have looked more tenderly or more proudly on her.

"Do you know," he said to Knich, "this flower will be my support?"

Knich bowed his head, and his movement seemed to say: "In truth you are right." To himself he said, "My Tarass is still too small to be a support to me."

He then put the théorbe in the hands of the beggar-girl.

"Come, it is time to start," he said. "I want to show you the road and return home before night."

He led them out of this underground place by another exit, which brought them into a

little back court, where were piled up old wheels, old broken wagons, tools, and old plows.

To see them going along the road, no one would have recognized in them the persons who had entered the underground passage a short time before. The old minstrel was now a poor man broken by age and poverty.

Maroussia, Maroussia with a joyful heart, was but an unfortunate little beggar-girl, and old Knich was again the slow and stupid peasant, whose inexhaustible kindness the soldier Ivan had tried to the utmost.

They walked a long time in silence as people do when they have no more to say to each other.

A detachment of Russians passed near them, without noticing them any more than if they had been the dust of the road.

They stopped. The old minstrel was seated on the grass, passing his hands over the strings of the *théorbe* which he had taken from Maroussia. In a low tone of voice, he sung a hymn with a monotonous refrain, a sort of evening prayer. His little companion, put to sleep by his song, no doubt, was lying

at his feet. As for old Knich, he listened, musing, with his head bent down. In truth they did not desire a glance from these beautiful soldiers. The halt of these three poor people was prolonged until the last Russian had disappeared in the distance.

Then each one of them arose. Their hands were clasped for the last time, their eyes lighted up, and by a common impulse, for a final farewell, each spoke these words: "Everything for Ukraine."

Having separated, the one retraced his steps, the other two walked forward; each went in the way of his duty without turning back for a last look.

CHAPTER XII.

CONVERSATION AND MUSIC.

At twilight, the old minstrel and his young companion found themselves in sight of the Russian camp, whose tents, pitched on a hill, were arranged in rows, one above the other, on the flowery slopes until they reached the very top.

The shades of evening began to spread over the earth ; some streaks of red still brightened the horizon.

The camp was quiet. The fatigue of the last battle had subdued all noise. The sentinels, gilded by the last rays of the setting sun, were so motionless at their posts that they might have been mistaken for statues. A few soldiers, still coming and going, wandered over the side of the hill ; silent groups, more numerous than one would have thought, some seated, others lying down, could hardly be distinguished from the undulations of the ground itself.

Although the evening was not far advanced, they could see in a tent the pale glimmering of a lamp, whose light pierced the canvas walls. As they approached, slight noises could be heard, a weapon removed, groaning, stifled laughter or fragments of sentences.

A sentinel challenged the old minstrel and his companion. A little disturbance occurred. Instead of allowing himself to be frightened by the "Who goes there?" which met him, by the sight of all the warriors, and retracing his steps, as many another would have done in his place, the old minstrel walked directly into camp.

He was, without doubt, an old man who wished to see everything, and closely too; who certainly liked soldiers, and probably had been one himself, otherwise he would not have advanced with so much confidence. This boldness produced a good effect. When one braves a danger so needlessly, it is because one has nothing to fear. Having respectfully saluted a group of officers, who, seated or half-lying down, were discussing their doings, he asked them, innocently, if it would be agreeable to them for him to give them

a little music, or even sing a song for them.

Any diversion is welcome in certain hours of life. His offer was accepted with pleasure.

They decided at the first notes, that he knew his art and listened with delight. Music has the gift of withdrawing the mind from the cares of the present, and of bearing it far away from its troubles.

Conversation ceased very soon, and the glances cast into space attested that each one, letting his thoughts run backward, was recalling to mind some dear remembrance, father or mother, wife or child, from whom war had separated him. Some soldiers, whose heads were bound by bloody bandages, raised themselves on their elbows to hear better. The minstrel sang of the family, of childhood and of youth. All was so far away! They were thankful to his song for revealing to them, in the midst of this day's shelter, the houses where they were born, and their firesides, for recalling to each one that war is not the whole of life.

The dead of yesterday were no longer there to say, "Yes, war takes the whole life," and

the dying, the dead of to-morrow, had not strength enough to protest.

More than one savage eye softened. The old man's success was so great, that, when he stopped singing, many hands had drawn from their pockets small pieces of money to give him.

"Come here, little witch!" exclaimed a large officer.

And showing a kopeck to Maroussia: "It is for your father, come and get it."

The little girl did not move, she was in a dream called forth by the song of her friend: How good the song was which he sang, and who would have expected it? How well he sang!

"Will you come, little savage?" another called to her. "Will you come, little duck?"

"You must thank these brave gentlemen, my daughter," said the old man, "go and give them your hand."

Maroussia trembled; but he had ordered, she obeyed. How her little hand shook in receiving these offerings! This money of the enemy burned her fingers.

"This little girl isn't ugly," said one.

"She has a pair of eyes that you might take for a pair of stars," said another.

"When you are grown up, little girl, I will come to marry you."

"It is agreed, is it not?" said a third.

But the old man's *théorbe* was heard again, and with a new accent. They forgot the little girl and listened to it,

This is in substance what the song of the old singer said this time: "Wild bird of the steppe, don't make your nest near the waters of the Desna, for the river is rising every day and its implacable waters will swallow up your little ones." While listening to the account of the death of these poor birds, and the heart-rending complaints of the father and mother powerless to save them, several grave, bronzed soldiers began to sob.

The day before, they had plundered everything, massacred everybody without hesitation. They had been the flood, but did not suspect it.

A young officer, handsome as a picture, self-satisfied, quick, with decided manners, had come out of his tent at the sound of the first note.

His face softened gradually, his self-consciousness disappeared, he had let his pipe go out, and he became very thoughtful. The old man's song recalled to him that he had been created in the image of God, before he had made himself in the image of his general. He had been about to forget it.

After this second song they asked for another. The old singer allowed himself to be urged a little.

"I am afraid," he said, "that the one I thought of would not please you, it is grave and sorrowful."

"Sing it all the same," said a tall, thin officer with a stern face. "Our calling dries our eyes enough, don't be afraid of moistening them. It is well to change our thoughts, and you have come at the right time."

"God grant it?" said the old man. "Very well, listen."

"A long time ago, long, long ago, a brave people had a country. Ah! a small country indeed, but for them it was the whole world. They cherished it. Their fathers had cultivated it, their mothers had adored it, their sisters had made a balmy paradise of it. They

lived quietly without troubling themselves about their powerful neighbors. One day these neighbors said to themselves: This country is happy, it is rich, it is charming, it will make a beautiful ring on our finger. And the prosperous little country was suddenly invaded. The strong nation's cavalry trampled under foot the sons of the small country. The sabres of beardless young officers struck down the heads whitened by age, and only women were left to guard their homes. The brave, strong young men, overpowered by numbers, perished in battle. The loving, courageous young girls must wait in vain for their brothers and lovers. Houses, villages, whole cities were destroyed.

“For what crime was this small country punished? For none! They took it because they coveted it. Who knows, however, if some day, this strong nation attacked by another more strong, will not be forced to suffer retaliation. And if it happens, in the name of what justice will the conquerors of to-day, become the conquered of to-morrow, raise their complaints to the Most High.”

While listening to this simple record of

facts, some did not apply it to themselves, but others did. To these last it was very clear.

Animated conversation began.

"Ha! Ha!" said the officer, who had just been complaining of having his eyes dry too long at a time. "This song of the past is meant for us. Did the old singer suspect it. It seems that the world has changed little, in the hundreds of years in which this song has been sung."

"Take that to yourself," said the small young man. "This singer is not wrong, but of what use are his lessons? Orders are given, we must obey."

"Of what do they complain?" cried another. "Ukraine for the Ukrainians! What does this cry mean? We don't want to eat their Ukraine! These actions are foolish! Is it such a distressing thing, when they were nothing but an ant-hill, to become at last a part of a great empire?"

"Nevertheless," said the fair young officer, "let us put ourselves in their place. Would not we do the same as they? It is always disagreeable to be taken by force. Zounds! You say that they will think no more of it in

a hundred years ; you speak the truth as to those who may be living in a hundred years, but as to those whose homes are on fire because they tried to defend them, the question is hardly the same thing."

"Such a little nation, a handful of people, has no right to live as it pleases. Great empires are necessary to accomplish great things."

"It is possible. But to live as you please in a dear little home that you adore, is a good thing, without doubt."

"Love of country, which is good for great nations, cannot be bad for small ones," said a young captain.

"You are right," said the old officer, philosophically, "for those nations which are too large finally fall to pieces. I am sometimes afraid of all our greatness."

It was plain that every one spoke without restraint. This will astonish those only who have not lived in camps. Discipline rules the body only, the tongue is less frequently enslaved there than elsewhere. The free soul takes its revenge everywhere.

Their talk turned little by little to the battle of the morning and of the day before.

"These peasants fight like heroes," said one.

"Like demons," said a robust fellow whose arm was in a sling. "If they had leaders and instruction, it wouldn't be so very easy to conquer them."

"To die from the wound of a pitch-fork isn't pleasant for a soldier," added another. "Who would have said that our colonel would end thus? 'What! not even by a thrust of a lance,'" he exclaimed, falling down. "Cursed be this war! What ugly wounds! The surgeons do not understand them. They are all puzzled, and how many there are wounded, how many dead! They are wolves, these peasants, real mad wolves. You think them killed; not at all, they rise up to bite you. Two more victories like this last one, and, if the reinforcements do not arrive, we can no longer keep the field."

"If our soldiers would only fight as they do!" said an old officer.

"They would fight thus," said a wounded soldier, "if they were fighting for their wives and children, and the homes of their fathers."

How pale he was, this poor soldier! And

what an effort he had made to raise himself up a little to speak such a truth to his superior! The officer spoke to him. But the soldier was silent, he had fallen back, he was dead.

The old minstrel had lost nothing of this conversation. Did he think that he had heard enough?

Suddenly he began such a joyous air, so bewitching, so gay, that it would make even a hermit want to dance.

It was the story of a young and brave girl, who had sold her petticoat to buy a pipe for her lover, and had carried it, lighted, to him, through a shower of balls on the field of battle. The general humor changed at once. The older soldiers beat time, the younger ones joined in the chorus with the singer. "What a fine singer!" they said. "What tones he draws from his *théorbe*! What a pleasant evening! Who could have expected it?"

The old man sang some more songs of the same kind, to the great joy of the soldiers, who at last came to him from all corners of the camp; then he arose and said farewell to

his numerous friends. Some of them offered to show him the way.

“Stay here, obstinate old fellow, stay until morning. The nights are cold, and the roads are not safe. Tell him, little girl, to stay until to-morrow. Good shelter and a good supper are worth waiting for. Zounds! He needn't be in such a hurry! Your receipts have been good. The blond officer put a gold piece into your hand. I saw him. Your grandfather can buy you a nice dress with it.”

The old man was firm. “A wandering singer must be on the wing,” he said smiling.

And he disappeared with the little girl in the shades of night.

“Do you know?” Maroussia said to him, “I heard some officers say the last battle had been so severe, that they would not be ready to attack Tchigurine for two weeks?”

CHAPTER XIII.

THEY APPROACH TCHIGURINE.

MAROUSSIA and her friend walked a good part of the night without speaking to one another. From time to time Tchetchevik stopped and offered to carry the child.

“I am not tired,” she always said.

The hours to Maroussia seemed to fly away like swift birds. Her heart was filled with enthusiasm. Her good friend was well satisfied. He had learned many things during the musical entertainment which he had dared to give in the camp. At the same time that he had heard with his ears he had looked and examined with his eyes. The conquerors did not sing of victory, the vanquished need not regret their efforts. Oh, if they could only be united together, disciplined, and their efforts be well directed! If this could be done, although the struggle was unequal, he would not despair. All depended on what he was going to find at Tchigurine, and it was necessary first to reach there.

What time was it? The starless heavens did not give very certain sign.

However, after hours and hours of walking, small red spots appeared before the travelers in the depths of the darkness. They were the lights of the city. Very soon the walls and large buildings could be seen.

There was something mournful in the aspect of this sombre city, with a few uncertain lights scattered at great distances. There was no noise, no sign of life. It was not the refreshing silence of sleep, but that of some restless expectation. The feeling of a near, terrible danger seemed to weigh on these houses crowded closely together.

The obscurity in which Tchigurine was hid seemed voluntary. A bright light would be a signal by which the enemy might profit. The high towers, parapets, forts, and ramparts, white in spots, had surely just been repaired. It was a good sign! The nightingales were singing as usual in the little gardens with which many houses were surrounded. Nothing told them of the danger threatening their country.

Tchetchevik and Maroussia approached the

gate of the city. It did not seem to be guarded! How could that be? The little gate, it is true, was only half-open, but behind it was no one, not even a gate-keeper.

They pushed it backward, it turned without noise on its hinges. No one stopped them, no one questioned them. Was it a trap? Nevertheless, it seemed to them that the eyes of some few passers-by, coming unexpectedly on their path, followed them with persistence.

"Listen to me, my brother," Tchetchevik said to a young Cossack, whom he saw leaning with his elbow on a garden fence, "listen to me; be a good fellow and show me the street which leads to our Ataman's house."

The young man, lifting his cap a little as a salutation, pointed to the end of the street, where a few half-lighted windows could be seen, and said to him:

"At the end of this street, turn to the left and you will be in front of the house of the great Ataman."

"Thank you, my brother."

They took the road shown to them, turned to the left, and found themselves before the dwelling they sought.

The house was no more spacious than the others, nothing distinguished it, not even a sentinel; it could be recognized only by its having a few lights. Two young girls, going by, stopped a moment, and, looking into the window, one of them said to the other:

"It seems that our Ataman is awake."

Through the glass of one of these little windows which was lighted, they imagined rather than saw a Cossack's head, with long mustaches, a head which seemed carved out of black marble.

"It is the sentinel," Tchetchevik said.

The soldier on guard, if he were one, remained motionless, as if absorbed in deep meditation.

Listening closely, they heard within, on the ground floor, the footsteps of a man, sometimes quick, sometimes slow.

"These steps are very expressive!" said Tchetchevik at last.

He knocked at the door, once, twice, three times slowly.

At the third knock, the Cossack, who was seated motionless near the window, arose, came and opened it.

The footsteps which they had heard ceased.

"Friends from afar send their greetings to the great Ataman," Tchetchevik said, in a low tone of voice, entering the house.

The apartment was anything but splendid. The first room was low, without any ornament whatever. The door leading into the next room was carefully closed.

"Very well, I am sure that the great Ataman receives such visits every day: wandering minstrels bringing news of distant friends."

"May I present myself before the great Ataman himself, brother?" asked Tchetchevik.

But, at this moment, the door leading into the next room was pushed wide open by an impatient hand, and the great Ataman appeared on the door-sill.

He said nothing, but his whole face asked: "Whence do you come? Who sent you? What news do you bring?"

The light shone feebly and his features could scarcely be distinguished. But his eyes, his piercing eyes shone like burning coals.

"I prostrate myself before the great Ata-



"I PROSTRATE MYSELF BEFORE THE GREAT ATAMAN."

Marousia, Page 164.

man," said Tchetchevik, making a profound bow.

Maroussia, who was standing by the side of her good friend, bowed also.

"You are welcome," the great Ataman answered. "What song will you sing for us, brave singer?"

The very sound of his voice told them that he was a man accustomed to command, a man not knowing how to restrain himself when his opinion must be declared or defended.

"What song, great Ataman? I have more than one for you to hear, and of my own composition, if you will deign to listen to them."

The great Ataman answered nothing. But what words, however strong they might be, could better express sadness, than this silence of a few moments!

"Whence do you come?" he said at last.

"From Zaporogié," Tchetchevik answered. "The brave men of Zaporogié present their respects to the great Ataman."

"In times such as these, no one should make or receive compliments," the Ataman answered. "Walk into my room."

Tchetchevik, holding Maroussia by the

hand, followed the great Ataman and entered the next room.

This room was as simple as the first : white-washed walls and stools of linden wood, such as can be found in every peasant's house.

But there were many very choice weapons, pistols and daggers, glistening on the walls.

Papers and notes covered the table, on these papers could be seen the *boulava*, the Ataman staff of command.

One side of the wall was furnished with large wooden hooks, upon which hung the costumes for holidays, all embroidered with gold, silver, and precious stones. This embroidery sparkled in the room and gave it a very strange appearance.

There was a bed in a corner, which seemed not to have given rest to him for whom it was intended.

The pillows thrown about told clearly how feverish the head was, which had sought sleep there.

"Be seated, I pray you," said the great Ataman.

He seated himself also, and his shining eyes

glanced alternately on the faces of Tchetchevik and Maroussia.

“Why is this child here?”

“She is deaf and dumb, pay no attention to her. Her head is only a little rose-bud which droops on its stem from fatigue, she needs sleep.”

The great Ataman arose, and, taking a magnificent mantle from its hook, threw it to Tchetchevik; a splendid Persian carpet covered a bench, he showed it to his guest. Tchetchevik prepared a bed in a moment, then lifting the tired little girl in his arms, he put her on it, and covered her with a mother's tenderness.

“Deaf and dumb,” he said to her, kissing her on the forehead.

The bed was in a corner of the room. Covered by the rich mantle, the child's eyes in spite of herself were fastened on the Envoy and the Great Ataman, seated at a table opposite each other, with a lamp between which lighted up both their faces. What a man her good friend was! How noble! How strong! Her little heart was full of pride while looking at him.

But the other, the great Ataman! She trembled with fear when she saw those deeply buried eyes, burning with a sombre fire, those heavy eyebrows, those premature wrinkles which furrowed his proud, noble forehead. This young, old man seemed to be consumed by an inward fire, which burned without ceasing day and night.

They talked quietly in a low voice.

Maroussia heard the murmur of conversation a long time, as one hears the distant noise of the waves. At last, weariness triumphed over the little girl, her eyes closed like the petals of a flower, she slept, she had become truly "deaf and dumb."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OBJECT—AND AFTERWARDS.

MAROUSSIA rested as one rests on the sharp edge of a perpendicular rock whose base plunges into the sea ; one sleeps, but at the same time, one feels that an abyss is nigh and hears its threatening sound. One dreams of many things, but has the vague consciousness that one may disappear in this vast ocean like a drop of water.

Sometimes a smile trembled on her lips, she saw again in her dreams her parents' house, the orchard of cherry-trees so fragrant, her little brothers, all the dear faces ; but very soon all disappeared as in a mist. Her past life so calm and joyous moved to the background. In the front arose, in characters of fire, new pictures, terrible or grotesque figures which she had known but a little time, but to whom belonged all her future.

Suddenly she awoke, raised herself a little on her improvised bed, and looked with all her eyes.

They were not asleep.

Tchetchevik was still seated, leaning with his elbows on the table, and his eyes were like very stars, which shone in a calm, equal, resplendent manner.

The great Ataman was standing in the middle of the room. It could be seen that he had jumped from his seat in a moment of grieved indignation, and stood as if the violence of a blow, aimed very accurately, had petrified him.

Finally he spoke :

“Ah! That is what you want! But the remedy will be worse than the disease. I know well that I have thrown myself into the water without searching for the place of the ford, but no more than I, will you reach the shore with the other. Our country without defences, without forces, without union, without councils, is but a house open to all winds, and our neighbors are very foolish to fight with us, they can obtain everything from our own discords.”

“Our discords? What is the principal cause of them, if it is not this government with two heads?” Tchetchevik answered coldly.



BUT THEY—THEY WERE NOT ASLEEP.

Marousia, Page 170.

“We must establish unity in affairs. There is no hope, no safety, but in union.”

The great Ataman felt as if burned by a hot iron. He made several turns in the room like a wounded lion. Then, having opened the window, he looked out into the darkness of night.

The silence was such, and the Ataman's emotion so great, that Maroussia, though at the other end of the room, thought she could hear his wounded heart beat.

Refreshed by the night air, calmed by its very silence, he returned and sat down by the little table, opposite Tchetchevik.

“At least,” said he, “it will be well understood that it is because I am the better man that you count upon me to give way to the worse. It will be known that it is because no renunciation is to be expected from him who has already learned one-half of his part from Judas, that you ask from me such an act of devotion.”

“It is,” said Tchetchevik, “to make it impossible for him to play the whole part of Judas, to take away from him every reason, every motive, every pretext of following it to

the end ; it is because we know that you are the most noble of the sons of Ukraine, that we ask you to efface yourself for a time before this unworthy man, whom your glory offends, and whom envy alone throws into the arms of the Russians."

"At least, no one will accuse me of treason, or of cowardice, when I have agreed to what you ask."

"On the contrary, no one will be ignorant of the heroism of your sacrifice. Do not our friends know, who sent me, how difficult it must be for you to decide upon it."

"And, if, in spite of all this, the miserable creature should sell us?"

"He will die before having fulfilled his contract," Tchetchevik said quietly. "He is, thank God, the only possible traitor in his family. Some one is watching near him who will not let him entirely dishonor himself."

There were pen, ink and paper on the table, the Ataman took the pen. Tchetchevik looked toward Maroussia and read her anxiety in her eyes. His little friend did not feel at her ease. It was so difficult to do what the Envoy exacted of the Ataman, that

the latter might finally become very angry, and then, between two men of their stamp what might happen?

A smile from Tchetchevik made the little deaf and dumb girl understand that she might be tranquil.

The Ataman was writing, weighing each word, as he had reason. For of all letters an abdication is not written between two whiffs of a pipe.

When the letter was finished he gave it to Tchetchevik.

“There,” he said, “are you satisfied?”

After having read it, Tchetchevik answered: “Satisfied? No, indeed! For I would give my life to put you in the place of him whom we seem to prefer. But I am proud for Ukraine of this renunciation of the noblest of her sons. If we must succumb in this struggle, our history will record one hero more. Those who die for Ukraine will have nothing with which to reproach themselves. You, who have done more than anyone, for you have descended from power to save her,—without even being sure of succeeding, you will die gloriously twice. Let your soul be

comforted! You give us the only means of uniting the country."

Tchetchevik folded the letter and hid it in the handle of a dagger which he carried under his robe.

"When shall you take it to its destination?" the Ataman asked him. "When will he know that I am ready to do anything for Ukraine, even to fight under his orders, he who, alone, is not capable of giving any?"

"Do you not know who inspires these orders," said Tchetchevik, "and who advises the person who suggests them to the other Ataman? Well! It is there that your letter will first be read. I will deliver it myself as soon as I have finished my tour. I will not lose an hour, my Ataman, you may rely upon it, and if everything does not go well, if I feel that your letter will be useless, be easy, I will destroy it. It will not have been written."

He arose.

Much moved by the end of this scene, Maroussia rushed forward near her good friend.

"Kiss the hand of him who has just written this letter," Tchetchevik said to her.

"Ah! I wish to do so," Maroussia exclaimed. "I am dumb when he wishes it," she said to the Ataman, "deaf when he commands me, I forget everything when he makes me a sign, and I love and honor all those whom he loves and honors."

And taking the Ataman's hand before he could withdraw it, Maroussia most respectfully kissed it.

"Ah!" the great Ataman said to Tchetchevik, "you are beloved!"

"You also are beloved," Maroussia said to him, "you are beloved by my good friend and by all of us because you love Ukraine."

The Ataman conducted them to the threshold of the door and there they separated: their last words had been: "Everything for Ukraine."

They left the Ataman standing, thoughtful, in the door of his house, and directed their steps toward the gate of the city. The streets were deserted, the little gardens were filled with cherry-trees white with blossoms, in the distance they could hear the fresh, gentle murmur of a river. After they had gone a

hundred steps, Maroussia turned around to look at the Ataman's house.

His tall figure was still in the door, and he was thoughtfully looking after them.

His face was scarcely visible by the uncertain light of the stars, but what they saw of his figure showed so much suffering that Maroussia's heart beat for him.

"Does he know how to defend Tchigurine?" she asked her good friend.

"Yes, if it is attacked, but our enemies can do much better than to take our cities by force."

"But if they do attack it?"

"He will be killed rather than surrender."

"I was sure of it," said the little enthusiast, clapping her hands.

They did not go out by the same street which they had taken on entering.

Tchetchevik wished to see with his own eyes the appearance of the other quarters of the city.

It would have seemed deserted to a careless observer, but a hundred steps apart were powerful men, whom chance alone could not have thus placed in the very spots where they

could watch everything. These men let them pass with a careless air, but very soon followed them, and returning on their path as if strolling about, were able, after all, to assure themselves that Tchetchevik went directly on his way. One of them, seeing the great height of the old singer, had come to look at him so close to his face that Maroussia trembled.

"He is bold, or perhaps thoughtless," she said in a low voice to her good friend; "he seems not to perceive danger any more than a fly."

"He is a strange fellow," Tchetchevik answered, "his intentions are not bad. The people of Tchigurine are of a good race, they go into battle as to a promenade."

When our travelers reached the gate of the city, a giant Cossack, who seemed to arise out of the earth, presented himself before them. He had two leagues of mustaches, and he barred their way like a stone tower.

"What is your business, old man?" he asked.

"That of honest men, my friend."

"Where are you going?"

“To honest people.”

“Honest is a name which does not always belong to those who claim it. It may be that you will meet rogues.”

“If one were always afraid of wolves, one would never dare venture into the woods, and one would never taste strawberries.”

“If I were a bolder Cossack, my old friend, I should beg you to sing me a little song. It would give me great pleasure, for I adore singing, but I am more timid than a young bridegroom and I do not dare to insist.”

Maroussia wished to see more clearly this timid one, but she found that the fellow's head was so high above her that she could see only the famous pair of mustaches, which hung down like two wisps of hay.

“You are timid,” Tchetchevik answered. “But try to regain courage. What do you want me to sing for you?”

“Anything.”

The singer murmured in a low tone of voice this refrain: “Sleep not, even in the night. The wolves roam about even in the darkness; in order not to be surprised by

them, you must have watchful eyes when everything seems quiet."

"Your song pleases me, and is to the point," said the timid fellow, "you can pass. I promised myself, surely, when I let you enter without saying anything, some hours ago, that on your return I would know the sound of your voice."

"He was there, he was there!" Maroussia said, satisfied, "the entrance was not deserted. So much the better!"

On the other side of the gate the road stretched itself out like a black ribbon on a green carpet. The nightingales certainly vied with each other in singing that night in all the gardens of Tchigurine. "They are singing for the break of day ; it is also a song of hope," Maroussia said to herself.

CHAPTER XV.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS.

Two weeks after the interview of Tchetchevik with the great Ataman, on a beautiful tranquil evening, the old singer with his Antigone was slowly approaching a village which had been destroyed by fire.

Their journey was not a pleasure trip. It was evident that they had not allowed themselves to take necessary rest; their large eyes shone with a feverish fire, their faces were burned by the sun, their clothing was covered with dust, their lips were dry and their feet sore.

Nevertheless they walked steadily and conversed calmly and cheerfully.

With the exception of several unexpected meetings with men who appeared on their path, no one knew how, and who scarcely exchanged a word, sometimes no more than a sign, with Tchetchevik, they had not usually met a living soul.

Everything was silent and deserted; they

had often seen houses in ruins, wasted farms, gardens destroyed, and trunks of trees half burned, black on one side and green on the other, half dead, half living.

They had now before their eyes a village recently burned ; a little smoke rising above each heap of cinders marked its location. At the end of a street they discovered the worn brink of a well.

"A little fresh water will do you good," Tchetchevik said to Maroussia.

And he put his hand in a bag which hung on his shoulders, took out a little wooden cup, and, putting aside the plants which obstructed the opening of the well, filled the cup with clear, fresh water.

"Thank you," answered Maroussia.

She moistened her lips with the limpid water, and having drunk it, approached the well. What did she see? What was there in the well which attracted her attention? She suddenly exclaimed :

"Ah !"

Her cheeks were covered with the most vivid color, her eyes lighted up and turned with joy toward her good friend.

She blushed again but this time her eyes dropped down and her face expressed sincere regret.

"Still another time, I have not been able to control myself," said Maroussia. "I ought to have restrained this cry—"

"Bah!" said Tchetchevik, "the danger cannot be very great in this burned village. No one could hear you, my child. If you wish, we will have some supper."

Their supper consisted of bread and water and a little salt.

But this "Ah!" full of joy, what could have drawn it from Maroussia? What treasure had she seen in this broken well? Nothing, absolutely nothing, unless it was a wreath of lovely violet flowers hung on the side of the well, the flowers which in Maroussia's home were thought to be flowers of good omen, and the very same which she had grown so lovingly in her mother's garden. This wreath had been put there recently by some friendly hand, it could not have come of itself. It said to Maroussia: "Everything is well with those whom you love, their thoughts follow you everywhere." To Tche-

tchevik it said: "Your orders have been executed."

Maroussia and her good friend understood one another, and talked about other things. Not a word concerning the little wreath was exchanged between them. Then they talked of Batourine.

"Is Batourine a large city?" asked Maroussia.

"Yes, but we can find our way through it, all the same," Tchetchevik answered.

The supper was finished.

"Well, then, Maroussia, have you regained your strength?"

She was already on her feet, she had fastened her little bag on her shoulders, and her eyes, which were fixed on her good friend, shone like stars. What did they ask him?

Before leaving the spot, Tchetchevik put his cane with the bent handle into the well, and drew out the little wreath. It was decidedly wet.. He shook it until all the pearls of water dropped from it, then placed it on Maroussia's head.

"What a dear little wreath!" she said.

"Do you really wish it to remain where you have put it?"

"Certainly," answered Tchetchevik. "It is very becoming to you. You look like a little fairy."

Maroussia clapped her hands. This was her greatest sign of joy.

Then they started again on their way, refreshed and courageous.

"Before the evening star appears above the horizon, we shall be at the tomb of Naddnéprovka," Tchetchevik said to the child.

These tombs, or rather, as they are called in the language of the country, *kourganes*, are hills of a peculiar form which are found in Ukraine. They cover, if the tradition is true, the bodies of those who have died for their country. And it is true, that when workmen disturb them, either with the plowshare or the pitchfork, they find weapons, rings and ornaments buried in them.

Tchetchevik was not mistaken; the evening star was not yet shining above the horizon, when the outlines of the tomb of Naddnéprovka arose before them.

The sun had already gone down, but the evening was still light, it was a sort of golden mist. The young trees, the shrubs and tall grass which covered the tomb seemed as if on fire. The shattered, broken cross was plainly reflected in the sky. Large birds of a deep gray color, passing between the red of the western sky and the earth, were tinted as if by a rainbow.

From the top of the tomb they saw the Dnieper. Its waters looked like the reflection of polished steel. On the other side of the river arose woody mountains, which were perfectly dark at the base, but their tops were still bathed in red light.

The low murmur of deep water could be heard and the rustling of the wind through the reeds. From time to time, the cry of a gull broke forth in the silence, and very soon the gull itself was reflected on the waters like a capricious little spot.

"It seems to me that the only thing wanting to make this charming picture perfect, is a little music," Tchetchevik said to Marousia. "What do you think? Suppose I sing a song to the Dnieper!"

"The very thing, I am glad you thought of it!" Maroussia said. "Let us be seated and amuse ourselves."

He took his *théorbe*, and very soon the mountain echoes repeated many times the words sung in a strong voice by the old singer:

"Leave us our prairies. Leave us our steppes. To whom do they belong, if not to us? Do their flowers know you? They will never know you. Seeing you at a distance even, they wither.

"Be afraid of the tears of the innocent. They will fall again some time on him who causes them to be shed.

"Be afraid of the silence of the man unjustly struck, the knout never killed a soul, and the wrongs of the father unjustly punished will be cherished by the child. The wrath of both will be added together."

The song was short but expressive. Having finished it, Tchetchevik gently touched the strings of his *théorbe* for a few moments. His piercing eyes were fixed on the Dnieper. Maroussia too did not take her eyes off the river.

Suddenly, a gull's cry was heard. This gull seemed to be on the edge of the river, down by the large rocks among the reeds.

Tchetchevik's eyes shone with a brighter light, and the mountain echoes repeated the refrain of a new song :

“There is not to be found a more unhappy person in the whole world than a Ukrainian, driven from the country where God has given him birth ; if he cannot live in the land of his fathers his duty is to die there. Whatever may happen, he will die there.”

The gull's cry was heard again, and it seemed to be nearer to them.

The mountain echo again repeated : “Whatever may happen, he will die there.” Then from the very spot where the gull's cry was twice heard, a narrow skiff came out of the midst of the tall reeds. It could be plainly seen on the dark waters, and, gliding rapidly, approached a little natural bay just opposite the tomb of Naddnéprovka.

Looking closely, they could distinguish the profile of him who was in the skiff. Yes, they could see even his sheepskin cap.

But, without being able to see clearly the

man's figure, they could tell that his arms were strong and skillful.

He handled the oars as if they were toys. The skiff flew along like a bit of down carried by the wind.

"It is time to go to the river bank," Tchetchevik said to Maroussia.

Without stopping to look for the best road, indeed they could not have found even a path in this wild place, they descended rapidly, going around a great rock, which looked like a large, curly, green beard, it was so thickly covered with ivy and moss, and found themselves at last on the bank very near the water. The waves gently washed the plants near the water, leaving on them a slight border of white foam.

"I hope I find you in health and always acceptable to God!" said a well-known voice.

The light bark was already on the sand of the river bank, and near it, with his chin resting on an oar, stood the good farmer, old Knich.

"Happy and well!" Tchetchevik answered.

"How are you, little girl?" Knich asked, fixing on Maroussia the eyes of a falcon.

“Very well!” Maroussia answered. “And Tarass?”

“Tarass has not forgotten you.”

For that matter, if Maroussia had not answered him, he could have divined her response, by looking at her only; every fibre of her body showed that fatigue was forgotten.

But the farmer, not satisfied with the testimony given by the happy face of the child, questioned Tchetchevik with a glance.

“My little companion is well, very well,” he said. “You can give a good account to those who confided her to me. She is a little lion, gentle as a dove,” and he patted the child with his hand.

“My little Tarass is not a lion, much less a dove,” Knich answered. “He is a little plague, I cannot teach him to hold his tongue.”

“Patience, patience,” said Tchetchevik, “our children will know much more than we some day. Well, Maroussia, you are assured of the welfare of your family.”

“Ah!” said Knich, seeing the wreath on the child’s head, “The little wreath has already told her. Your mother’s hands arranged it, my dear little child.”

“Good father Knich,” said the little girl, “how many pleasant things you and the wreath tell me!”

“Come, come,” said Tchetchevik, “the river is quiet, there is not a breath of air; a row in the skiff will be very pleasant.”

He had scarcely spoken, when a gull’s cry, like those they had already heard, came out of the thick gray beard of the good old farmer.

A similar cry answered him from the shore.

“Ah!” Tchetchevik said, “you see, Maroussia, it is the husband who answers.”

“I understand, I understand,” said the little girl, “the gulls on the banks of this river are very clever, although all of them have not wings.”

Knich had pushed his skiff into the water.

“Come here, little girl,” he said, reaching his hand to Maroussia. When she was seated, Tchetchevik jumped so lightly into the boat that it scarcely moved. He seized the second oar, and the little craft glided swiftly over the dark waters between the banks of the Dnieper already indistinct in the twilight.

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE WATER.

WHEN they were in the middle of the river, "What news from the other Ataman?" Tchetchevik asked Knich.

"Everything will be better when you have been there," answered the farmer. "Fortune helps fools, God helps only the wise. They are roasting chickens, preparing geese and feasting. Briefly, there are too many strangers, too much luxury, and too great expense. They cannot make out the mind of the master of the house, do you know? Perhaps he hasn't any—"

"That would be unfortunate," Tchetchevik answered. "It is the fate of those who belong to everybody, that they belong no more to themselves."

"But your Ataman, the one whom you have seen?" asked Knich.

"This one," Tchetchevik answered, "this one is a true man, and if all were like him nothing would be lost. The day when his

soul appears before God, no one can say that it inhabited a trunk of rotten wood. He has his failings, certainly, he is not perfect, but he loves his country more than his life, even more than his pride. He has consented to everything, even to efface himself before that brute yonder, and that is grand! For a haughty, proud head is not made to stoop. It is done. He has written it. But his pen rasped on the paper like the bark of a birch-tree on hot coals."

"Well," Knich said, "that is easily understood. It must have been hard for him."

"It was necessary," said the impassive Tchetchevik.

"Then," continued Knich, "we can say that, thanks to God and to you, one-half of the work is done; there remains the other Ataman, the Ataman left alone! This one excels in going around in a circle."

"We will follow him around," said Tchetchevik, "and we will enlarge his circle."

Suddenly turning from Knich, Tchetchevik threw a heavy cloak into the bottom of the skiff, and taking Maroussia, in spite of her resistance, laid her gently on the cloak.

"I forgot to put my child to bed," said her good friend.

"I do not want to sleep," answered the little girl.

"You need not sleep, but rest yourself," said the Envoy in a firm tone of voice. "I will tell you a story very soon."

Instead of sleeping, Maroussia, half raised on her elbow, was looking about. What eyes she had for seeing everything before the others!

"Down there, on this side," pointing with her finger, "don't you see anything?"

"The child is right," said Knich, "there they are."

"Silence!" said the Envoy.

The boat flew under the redoubled efforts of the two rowers, and very soon, in spite of the distance, Maroussia could recognize old acquaintances in the two men she had pointed out this side of the little promontory. They were those whom she had seen struck and bound by the soldiers in her father's house: Semène Vorochilo and Andry Krouk. God be praised! They had then been able to escape.

The boat soon landed. The Cossacks took off their caps to the new-comers and said :

“ Good luck and good health ! ”

“ Good luck and good health ! ” answered Tchetchevik and Knich.

“ Maroussia, ” said Andry Krouk, taking a parcel from his bosom, “ here is what your mother sends you. ”

“ Blessed be whatever comes from my mother ! ” said the little girl, kissing the parcel. “ Are they all well ? ”

“ All of them, little and big. ”

“ And, ” said Maroussia, as though a little ashamed of the question she was going to ask, “ and the cherry-trees ? And the garden ? ”

“ What a housekeeper ! ” said Andry. “ Your garden is all right, and your cherries, God willing, will ripen in the warm weather. ”

“ I was thinking of the cherries for my little brothers, ” said the child.

“ What news do you bring me in exchange for what I sent you ? ” asked Tchetchevik.

“ Many are satisfied, ” answered Vorochilo. “ These will be ready, and are now, but others— ”

"Others," said Andry Krouk, interrupting him, "are uneasy. They think that you go too fast, and I think they are right."

Maroussia had thoughtfully stepped a little aside to allow them to talk more freely.

Tchetchevik called her back, and, to the great astonishment of the three Cossacks, said to her :

"I promised you a story in the boat. A promise given must be fulfilled. If you understand my story, these men will understand it too. Andry Krouk, you may tell it to those who think that I go too fast."

And he began his story thus :

THE STORY OF A CRAB.

"Once there was a crab, as beautiful as the day. She was good, very intelligent for a crab, and very brave. She lived quietly in her little home, but behold, one day, of a sudden, she heard cries and groans around her. It seemed that the water was growing low, had in fact fallen so low that every creature which lived in it was very much alarmed. She had noticed for a long time that the water was diminishing, but she had done as

the others, she had hoped that matters would arrange themselves.

"In the face of so many lamentations, the crab said to herself that the subject was worthy of attention. She became very thoughtful, and came to the conclusion that it would be truly desirable for some one to devote herself to the duty of going after water for the others. To whom should a mission of such importance be confided?

"The crab took counsel, but could not fix her choice on any one.

"In her heart she had confidence in herself alone. This one didn't know the road well enough, that one would play on the way, a third would commit a thousand follies. The opinions of most of them were too advanced. Peter's character was not reliable, and Paul was too delicate to bear the fatigue of such a long journey, for the water was at a great distance.

" 'I will go myself,' she said at last.

"She seized a jug and started on her journey, escorted for some steps by the enthusiastic cheers of those who like to see others work better than to work themselves.

“‘What a crab,’ they cried on all sides. ‘How much energy! If she will hasten a little, we shall be saved.’ The frogs wept with emotion, and the tadpoles fainted with joy.

“Behold my crab on her way; she does not lose a moment, but goes straight on her road, and walks, walks, walks without even taking time to breathe.

“But little by little she becomes very tired, and indignation begins to arise in her breast.

“‘I am crazy to run thus,’ she said to herself. ‘I fly like an arrow, there is no common sense in it. Let me be reasonable and walk naturally.’

“Retaking, then, her accustomed gait, she began to walk, as usual, with measured step. She took seven years to go in search of the water, and ten to return with it to her home.

“This need not astonish any one, for a full jug is much heavier and more difficult to carry than an empty one.

“When she returned to the threshold of her home, she had a little stairway of four steps to mount. It was there that the boats had formerly landed. She climbed up these

steps, but not without difficulty. With a jug, it was not an easy thing to do.

“Once at the top, she turned around to look at the pond and the little brooks which ran into it, they were all dry. An ant could not have found water enough within ten leagues to quench his thirst.

“‘It is high time that I came,’ she said to herself, ‘high time indeed! But where are those who cheered me so when I started? What a strange welcome; such a silence after so much devotion!’

“A curious old magpie was perched on a half-dried-up tree. She looked to see what the crab was doing, and listened to her expressions of astonishment.

“‘Don’t be angry with them,’ said the magpie, ‘if they do not cry: Long live the heroic crab. It isn’t their fault, they are all dead. Behold their shells, their bones, their skeletons! It is all that is left of them. Do you know, my dear, you have taken seventeen years to bring them the water which they ought to have had at once?’

“The poor crab was so excited, in verifying with a glance the truth of the magpie’s

words, that, in trying to raise her claws to heaven in sign of despair, she forgot the jug she was carrying and let it fall on the ground. It was broken into a thousand pieces, the thirsty ground swallowed up the water it contained in the twinkling of an eye, and the next day, in her turn, the crab also was dead."

"Do you understand, Andry Krouk? And your friends who think that I have been too fast, will they be of the opinion when you relate my story to them, that they would have done better, in place of choosing me for a messenger, to have sent a crab?"

Andry Krouk scratched his ear and dropped his face.

Vorochilo tapped him on the shoulder :

"Awake," he said, "and let us go and awake the others. Tchetchevik is a hundred times right."

Turning, then, toward the Envoy, "On the day agreed upon," said Vorochilo, "the Ukraine will arise; the women and children, too, will be ready if they are wanted."

"Andry," said Maroussia, "don't forget the story of the crab."

"She understood it before I did," Andry said, embracing her. "You are indeed your mother's daughter, my little girl."

Old Knich was already in the skiff. He helped Maroussia to climb into it, and Tchetchevik jumped in with the lightness of a bird.

The little boat, pushed from the shore, glided again over the dark waters of the Dnieper; the sandy promontory and the indistinct forms of the two men they had left there soon disappeared in the mist.

On the bank of the river, while landing, Knich showed to Tchetchevik a beautiful, strong, black horse.

"Take Maroussia up behind you," Knich said to the Envoy, "and gallop all night. To-morrow turn the horse loose, he will find alone the farm of Samousse."

The old minstrel jumped on the horse, Maroussia put her foot on the toe of his boot and in an instant was seated behind her good friend. Her arms were clasped about him like a vine around an oak. The horse started on a gallop, the sound of his feet was so light that one might have said that he was a winged steed.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT GADIATCH.

THE third day after they left the Dnieper, as we told in the preceding chapter, was Sunday, and the great bells of the city of Gadiatch, the residence of the Ataman protected by his Majesty the Tsar of Russia, were ringing a full peal, inviting the faithful to matins.

It was scarcely day, and the city of Gadiatch, with its narrow, winding streets, its low buildings and bushy gardens, seemed to be enveloped by a half-transparent veil. The people, hurrying from all its sides toward the cathedral, appeared to be wrapped in a shadow.

Nevertheless, in spite of the twilight, it was easy to see, by their determined gait and decided manners, that the greater part of the people were soldiers.

The day before, it had rained a great deal and the warm air was of a delicious freshness. Everything in nature was calm, everything silent among the people, so calm and so silent

that the noise of the footsteps in the damp street could be heard; the imprudent foot which stepped into a pool made a loud splash, the drops of dew which fell from the foliage might have been counted.

The old cathedral seemed to be surrounded by a garden. One could see in bloom the alburnum, eglantine, elder-tree, roses, white, red and yellow acacia, apple, pear, plum and cherry trees, which promised a great abundance of fruit. The ground was covered with a velvety verdure strewn with all kinds of flowers.

A crowd of the faithful of goodly size were gathered near the cathedral, and, while waiting for the hour of service to begin, each one talked in a low voice of one thing or another.

The old wandering minstrel, whom the reader already knows, was in the midst of this crowd, accompanied, as usual, by his little friend, who was looking respectfully on the house of God.

He had seated himself on one of the church steps, like a man overcome with fatigue, and with a slow, grave voice was relating to a numerous assemblage, which surrounded him,

through what trials the souls of the wicked must pass before attaining the heavenly place. "It is on the earth, by constant effort, that one must merit heaven," he said at last.

Having finished his recital with a sigh, to which the sighs of the greater part of his audience responded, the old singer seemed to fall into a profound reverie, as often happens to pious persons who forget the earth for heaven, and his pensive eyes wandered without any object over the surrounding objects as they began to emerge from the darkness.

The silence which had fallen on the group was broken by the arrival of two young Cossacks. They attracted attention by their extremely long mustaches, their tall, graceful figures, and an elegance of manner peculiar to those who visit among the nobility and are seen at the receptions of the great.

"Good-morning, good-morning!" said the young Cossacks, and they took off and put on their hats with so much grace that one might have thought that they spent their time in doing nothing else but bowing.

"Is our Ataman coming?" asked several voices at once.

"He is coming," answered the Cossacks.

These words, spoken by two clear, sonorous voices, seemed to draw the old singer from his pious meditation, and, abandoning with regret the better world upon which his mind was intent, he thought it his duty to come down to earthly affairs, and occupy himself with whatever was of interest to the crowd.

"My poor eyes," he said, "can they at last behold our Ataman!"

"Is the Ataman's wife coming?" asked a young woman, quick in her motions, small and round as a ball.

"His wife is coming," answered the Cossacks.

"And his sister-in-law?"

"We think his sister-in-law also is coming."

"What sister-in-law?" asked the old singer.

"Méphodiévna, the wife of our Ataman's brother," answered many voices.

"Méphodiévna?" repeated the old singer. "We never hear of her at our home. Does she enjoy the favor of our Ataman and his wife?"

"Indeed she does! Indeed she does!" answered many persons. "She has only to

move her finger and everything is done as she wishes!"

"Ah! She enjoys then great favor. It is certainly a great blessing for her!"

"Favor!" exclaimed an old man with an angry air, whose eyes sparkled beneath his heavy gray eyebrows, like two well-lighted windows which illumine the house under the thatched roof. "Favor! Is such a word made to be applied to such a woman! Méphodiévna, understand, is of the stamp not to care about favors from any one. One glance will be sufficient to tell you this. She is as straight as an arrow, and you can easily see that she has never bowed her head before any one."

"She is, then, very proud," asked the old singer, "and in consequence, it is very difficult to approach her? It is pride then!"

And he added in a sententious voice:

"The proud man is like a soap-bubble, he only inflates himself to burst."

"But what are you saying there, old man?" cried an old woman with a respectable face and eyes blazing with indignation. "What are you saying there? You are speaking of

the honor of our city and country. Méphodievna is a beneficent light, a lamp in our darkness."

"To be so brilliant," continued the obstinate singer, "she must appear sparkling with diamonds and covered with gold and precious stones."

"You are not right there!" some one cried from the crowd. "She is so simply dressed, that but for her eyes like black diamonds, you would take her for some one else."

"She dresses like a common person," said a young Cossack; "she doesn't act the grand lady, and she is always where she can do good without being seen."

"Pardon me!" said the singer. "I have, I see, blasphemed your saint, but she has not lost anything by it. I have, at least, given you the opportunity of rendering her homage. Can you tell me, young man, who are these fine lords, richly dressed, who are to be seen everywhere in the city? Are they saints also?"

"Saints? Ah, no indeed! They are their highnesses, the Russian princes. Cannot you guess it by their important manners, their

eyes half-shut, and their scornful noses, higher than their heads? They are the guests of our Ataman. A week ago, his house was full of them, the friends of Ukraine were anxious about it. But, thanks to God and to the influence of Méphodiévna over her sister and over the Ataman, many of them, it is said, have already departed."

"Departed? Wherefore? What annoyed them, these magnificent gentlemen."

"Ah, ha! Ask Méphodiévna; perhaps she thought the time was not well chosen, when one-half of Ukraine is invaded by Russian troops, to entertain so many fine gentlemen. It diverts our Ataman too much."

"To tell the truth," said a new speaker, "they have not had so much amusement at the palace for a week past. The Ataman does not entertain his guests cordially. He seems annoyed with them, and, so it is said, there will soon be none of them left in the country."

Maroussia gently pressed the hand of her good friend. Doubtless his hand responded to the pressure, for the child's face shone. Suddenly there was a great silence. They could just see Father Mikail coming down

the street toward the door of the church. Those who were seated arose. Those who were standing stood up on tip-toe.

Father Mikail in his whole person presented the ideal type of the good priest. His people adored their pastor. There was a strife as to who should be first in his way to receive his benediction.

His attitude showed that it was not his hands alone which gave these benedictions, but that they came from the depths of his heart.

The singer approached in his turn, placing Maroussia before him.

"Bless us, father, bless this child. We have come a long distance to pray to God in your church."

The good priest glanced benevolently on the old man and the child.

"Father," said the singer, "I have learned that the largest fire can only extinguish itself in the midst of the desert, while even green wood sparkles and burns when it is put in the midst of the fireplace, and I have left the desert through the necessity of seeing and meeting men."

Father Mikail trembled on hearing these words. His clear, gentle eyes were fixed on the old pilgrim with an especial attention. He bowed his head in sign of assent to the old man's words, and said :

"If you come from a distance, my brother, if you have traveled over all the country, you must have seen much suffering and encountered many dangers. The roads are not safe."

"He who is naked," said the singer, "need have no fear of his shirt being stolen. He who has only his life to lose does not tempt robbers, and he who does not fear death can go anywhere."

The good priest trembled again.

"Are our fields ready for the harvest?" he asked the old singer.

Father Mikail uttered the question slowly, weighing well each word, seemingly so simple.

"Our grains are in some places already cut down, and it is not always the owners who have mowed them. As to the others, and I speak of the best land and the best prepared, truly, although not everywhere perfectly ripe, I do not think it will be wise to wait any

longer to harvest them. Who can foresee the storms of to-morrow? The fields which are ripe are very fair, my father."

"May God be with you, my son," answered the venerable priest, with calmness; "I thank you for the news you have brought me."

"Our Ataman! Our Ataman!" they cried on all sides.

Father Mikail entered the church.

"Our Ataman does not appear very gay to-day," said a workman in the crowd.

"You might even say that he looks cross," said another.

"I met him day before yesterday," whispered a sprightly little woman, "he looked like a great black cloud."

The arrival of two new persons interrupted the little woman.

"It is our Ataman's sister-in-law," could be heard on all sides.

"Méphodiévna," said one of his neighbors to the old singer, pushing his elbow.

Had they told him nothing, he would have guessed it. Their description of her had not been exaggerated, the original corresponded to the portrait.



"THANK YOU, MY PRETTY CHILD."

Marousia, Page 210.

She was going to pass very near Maroussia, she had reached the last step. The little girl ventured to stop her by taking hold of the sleeve of her embroidered chemise.

"Madam," said Maroussia, "you dropped this handkerchief," and she gave her a red handkerchief.

The young woman stopped, looked at the red handkerchief, then at the little girl presenting it, and said:

"Thank you, my pretty child! I should have been very sorry to have lost it."

No one, I think, unless it was Maroussia, had seen the handkerchief fall.

The large eyes of the amiable woman glanced at the child with a searching look and from her to the old singer. "You do not live here," she said to the child, "I have never seen you, do you come from far, my dear child?"

"Very far," answered Maroussia.

"I understand, then, why you look so tired. From what part of Ukraine do you come?"

"Her little head will never be able to remember the names of all the places she has visited," said the old singer. "We have seen

many things and many people, Madam, good and bad, the country devastated by battles, and our fields, the last hope of Ukraine, now ready for the harvest. But, thanks be to God, we have found our way. As we say at home, although the horse may not be well harnessed, the cart goes straight to the market."

"My friends," replied the gracious woman, "come very soon and present yourselves to the great Ataman. You can relate your journey to me, to him you can sing your songs. Each one will thus be served according to his taste."

She gave a little tap with her hand on Maroussia's cheek, like a caress, and disappeared in the crowd which was filling the church.

The voice of Father Mikail could already be heard as he began prayer.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DO NOT PLAY WITH DAGGERS.

THE services were over. The Ataman had returned to his palace. The heat was oppressive, the sun blinding with its light. The sky was a great vault of blue.

Nevertheless some black clouds, coming from the west, could be seen on the horizon.

"We shall have a great storm this afternoon," said the Ataman.

He was standing on a terrace which surrounded the court of the garden; he spoke these words with so much anxiety, that a Russian lord, his last guest, a middle-aged man with a yellow beard, could not help showing his surprise.

"Every Christian ought to tremble," continued the Ataman, crossing himself, "when God speaks in thunder."

"God will bring us safe and sound out of these storms and all others," answered the Russian lord. "I confess, however, that those black clouds look threatening."

"Very threatening, indeed," answered the Ataman.

They were approaching with the rapidity of vessels driven by the tempest.

The Ataman pressed his forehead with his hand as if he felt unutterable pain. The presence of his guest, the scrutiny of which he felt himself the object, annoyed him. If the Russian could read his thoughts. Alas! Alas! what would he see there? Confusion, indecision, bitter regrets.

What to do? How to decide? Why had God made him the chief of his people in such trying times? How to escape from the clutch of the Russian Eagle? And if he must submit to this insult, would he, by showing that he bore it with horror, lose even the fruits of his weakness and treason? The elegant Russian lord read the face of the ponderous Ataman as if it had been a book. The fox was playing with the elephant.

Suddenly the cloudy countenance of the Ataman brightened like that of a child who discovers a new plaything at his feet. He had just seen an aged beggar, accompanied by a little child, coming up the path which led

to the terrace. The beggar had a théorbe. He was a singer. The diversion came at the right time for this apathetic character.

"These people know songs which I prefer to all our concerts," said the Ataman, addressing himself to his guest, who was watching him.

He motioned to a Cossack, giving him the order to let the old singer and his little girl approach nearer.

"Will the great Ataman deign to hear me?" said the old man, accompanying his request with such a respectful look that it was equivalent to the humblest bow.

The goodness of the Ataman went so far as to point out, with his plump white hand, a place at the corner of the terrace, where the singer could seat himself.

"There," he said in a mournful voice, "the sun will not incommode you."

The Russian lord, watchful by nature, noticed that the shoulders of the old singer seemed very broad and strong, and was surprised to see that the coarse shirt which he wore was as white as the driven snow. He would have been glad to look at the old man's

face, but the Ataman in a great excess of goodness had said to him :

“You may keep on your cap, old man.”

After a prelude, the old minstrel began to sing. What a powerful, sweet voice he had, and how much talent !

The Ataman, an amateur musician himself, was much affected by it. The song was beautiful. It was one of those Christian hymns which bring man and his soul into the presence of his Creator. Attracted by his magnificent song, the Ataman's wife and his sister-in-law appeared at the end of the terrace, very near the old singer.

Méphodiévna recognized the little girl who had given her the red handkerchief, and whom she had invited to come to the palace. Leaning on a large box in which a rare plant was blooming, she motioned to Maroussia to come to her. The box was so high and the child so small that she was entirely hidden from the view of the Ataman and the Russian lord.

Maroussia drew a dagger out of her sleeve and slipped it into the sister-in-law's dress pocket.

Did Méphodiévna notice this action? Her face gave no sign of it. Her large eyes, lost in space, were wholly intent on the music.

Maroussia took her place again near her good friend, without any one having perceived that she had left it for an instant.

The old man continued to sing:

"Heaven is for the just, for them alone."

"For them alone," murmured the great Ataman.

"The oppressors, the conquerors will see their slaves enter there, but the angel with a flaming sword will bar their passage."

The Russian lord had heard enough of this music. He pretended to conceal a yawn.

"These are things," said the great Ataman, "which we must never forget."

"Do you know the song of the bandit?" the Russian asked the musician, "sing it for us, old man."

"To my great regret, your Highness, I do not know it," answered the singer.

"What a pity," said the amiable lord, "it would have amused these ladies. Women have a liking for notorious scamps."

Méphodiévna, from the distance where she

was, cast so proud a glance upon him, that he dropped his eyes and a slight blush colored his cheek for a moment.

“Your *théorbe* is very curious,” said the Russian to the singer, in order to change the conversation. “It is not a common instrument. You really have a very pretty *théorbe* there. I would like to see it nearer. Pass it to me, old man.”

“Here it is, your Highness,” answered the old singer, presenting it to him. “Look at it well, examine it, and you will see that it is a real treasure.”

The Russian, laughing a good deal, drew some discordant sounds from the primitive instrument, then seated himself on a step of the terrace a little above the singer, and said again :

“A very pretty *théorbe* indeed !”

While pretending to admire the *théorbe* he scarcely looked at it, but was observing, without letting it be seen, the owner of the famous instrument. But the proprietor of the *théorbe*, though a man excessively modest, to judge by appearances, did not seem to be disturbed by these indiscreet glances, no, not at all.

With all the respect due to a person of such high rank, but without embarrassment, without being confused, he explained to his highness the mechanism of the *théorbe*. One might have even said that these explanations, in place of making him confused or timid, amused him very much.

"Do you know that this object of art, if you will sell it, will bring you sufficient money to give you a long rest."

"I know it," answered the singer, "but the good musician parts with his *théorbe*, when he loves it, no more than the cavalier parts with his horse. In being poor one is not forbidden to have a taste for beautiful things. My clothes are not worth much, your Highness, but I have been offered more than once, for my *théorbe*, sufficient to dress myself in as magnificent garments as yours, and I refused."

"He understands," said the Russian to himself, "how to set a value on his goods; it is to sell it at a better price that he pretends to know the worth of it."

The beggar drew nearer.

"Since you are a connoisseur," said he,

"examine the instrument at your leisure. Certainly it would be more in its place in the hands of these rich ladies than in mine, nevertheless it is in mine that it will remain."

"I see your cunning," thought the Russian; "you are a shrewd fellow, you hope to force me to buy it, and think that at this very moment I am going to offer you a large sum for the pleasure of laying your théorbe at the feet of the beautiful Méphodiévna. You may deceive others, but not me, sly old fellow!" "Then," said he, "this is your treasure, your fortune?"

"The théorbe, and this also, my lord."

He drew from his bosom a dagger, alike in everything to the one in whose hand we saw him enclose his precious message at the house of the other Ataman; like also the one which Maroussia, a moment before, had slipped into the pocket of Méphodiévna, and which, without doubt, if it were the same, had made but a short stay there.

"Upon my word!" said the lord, who had a passion for beautiful weapons, "here is an object truly precious," and, reaching out his

hand to the old man, his eyes shining with covetousness, he said to him distinctly: "I wish to examine this marvelous dagger more closely."

The mischievous old man, no doubt to excite the desire of the Russian, turned and re-turned his dagger, drew out and put back the beautiful blade in its sheath, but without placing it in the nobleman's hand.

"This dagger is my friend," he said, "it is my defense. When we are together we fear nothing; more than this, it is sacred to me, for I received it from my father."

"Let me, then, touch it," said the nobleman, "I will not swallow it."

"It would be unhealthy, my lord, even for a strong, young stomach like yours."

Yielding to his wishes, the singer at last confided the dagger to him.

The Ataman, whom this little scene had diverted for a moment, relapsed into his apathy. He came out of it with a start. A large drop of water, such as prefaces severe storms, had fallen on his hand. The rumbling of thunder, distant at first, was coming nearer, the storm was approaching with giant

strides. The heavens had become in a moment as dark as night.

"Give back the dagger to this man," said the Ataman to his guest, "and let us go in."

"What a blade," said the great lord with admiration, and brandishing it in his hand he made it glitter by the flashes of lightning.

"I want it," he said at last in an imperious voice to the old man. "Set your price and sell it to me."

His tone of voice was not that of a buyer, but of a man who can take, and who is going to take that which he thinks himself very good to be willing to buy. It was a command, and as the old man still remained silent, he added :

"Sell it to me; money replaces everything."

"Everything!" answered the old Ukrainian, in a voice which was struggling to be calm. "What, even honor, and liberty!"

"Ah! Yes!" cried the Russian. "That which you call honor, and that which you call liberty!"

Then, looking into the face of the old man, and answering without shame the thought

which the pretended singer suggested to him :

"If Ukraine becomes rich under the government of Russia, she will not long remember that she was once proud and free."

At the moment when he spoke these wicked words, the heavens burst into lightning, with such a clap of thunder, that all those who were on the terrace, and Méphodiévna herself, were astonished to find themselves unhurt.

The frightened Ataman ran into the house, his trembling wife following him. Méphodiévna, hesitating, abandoned the terrace, though with evident regret.

But why did Maroussia, standing by the side of her good friend, seem changed into stone? Why this sudden pallor on the cheek of Tchetchevik himself?

"Méphodiévna!" he exclaimed, extending his hand to the Ataman's sister-in-law.

There was something of supreme renunciation in the gesture, and of command in the voice, suddenly grown young, of the old singer.

The young woman returned resolutely to the terrace.

“Behold!” said Tchetchevik to her, “behold! One second of time was sufficient for the justice of God to strike down him who just now was looking so scornfully on our Ukraine.”

The young woman glanced at the spot pointed out by Tchetchevik’s extended arm. Shocked in her turn by what she saw so unexpectedly, Méphodiévna drew back a step.

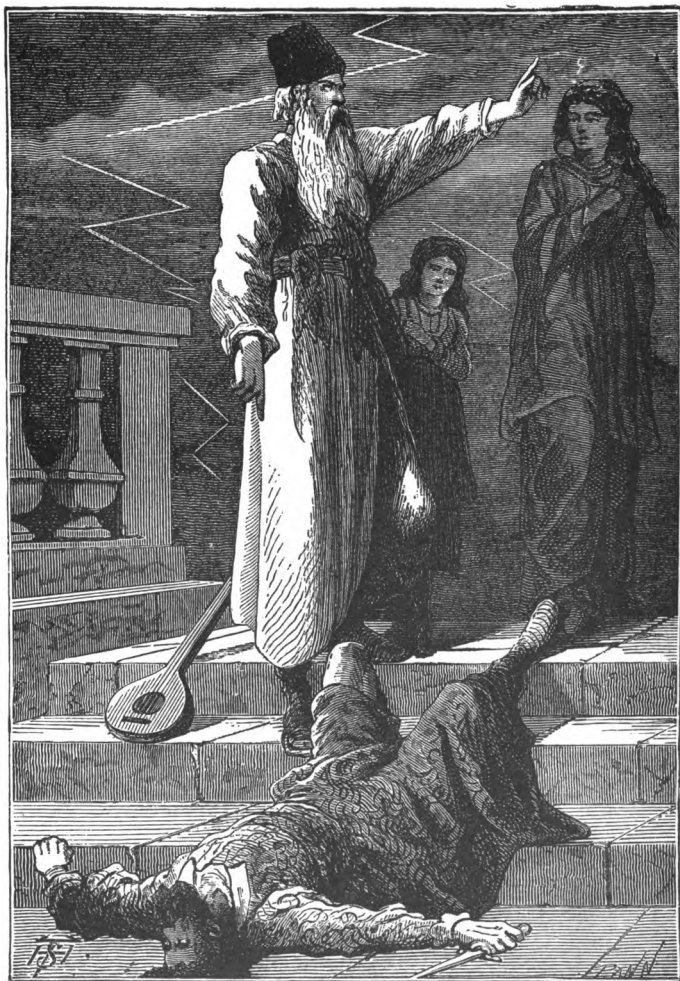
But with a sudden turn: “God has freed Ukraine from her most detestable enemy,” she said in a trembling voice. “May His will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”

The noble Russian lord was lying dead on the ground, struck by lightning.

Tchetchevik stooped down and withdrew his dagger from the burnt hand of the Russian. The blade, so imprudently exposed by him in the midst of the lightning, had no doubt acted as a conductor for the electricity.

Then lifting up the would-be buyer of the dagger, Tchetchevik, followed by Méphodiévna and Maroussia, carried him with a rapid step into the palace of the Ataman.

Let us be silent when God strikes!



"AN INSTANT SUFFICES FOR THE JUSTICE OF GOD."

Marousia, Page 224.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE HAPPY YEAR.

FOR more than a year it seemed as if Ukraine was going to gain her independence. The whole country had arisen like one man. The invaders had disappeared, surprised by a movement so sudden, so general and spontaneous. Each Ukrainian had retaken, reconquered his field, his cottage, his farm or his house. Better still, each one had once more been able to gather in his harvest. Step by step, from the lake to the river, from the steppe to the forest, the enemy had been forced to retreat.

The Ataman of Tchigurine, after having heroically defended and saved the city, and given proofs of great bravery, had died, died like a hero, died happy, in full triumph. A man, unknown till then, Tchetchevik the Lion, it was thus they very soon named him with a common voice, fought by the side of

the Ataman in the hand to hand conflict in which he was killed. The intrepid Lion rescued the body of his chief, covered with noble wounds, from the enemy, and took his place at the head of the movement in that part of the country.

At Gadiatch, the other Ataman, acknowledged as supreme chief, had gained his former courage. There was often seen by his side, sometimes before him, a beautiful woman on horseback, who did not command, but always appeared in the worst of the battle, and whose presence alone had the power to arouse every one's enthusiasm, to reanimate every one's courage.

She was followed everywhere by a courageous little page, who was her flag-bearer, and who, mounted on a black horse, waved his flag with a valiant hand in the midst of the balls, careless of danger. The soldiers adored this little warrior, who was as beautiful as an angel. Was he in truth an angel, or only a child, or, as some pretended to say, a simple little village girl, animated with a divine fire, a superhuman courage, and whom nothing could make afraid? He was

all this at once. It was all true, for this page was *Maroussia*.

She was a child Jeanne d'Arc, in a country where the name of Jeanne d'Arc had never been spoken except by accident.

Obliged to be everywhere at once, Tche-tchevik had left her with Méphodiévna. They were inseparable; whoever saw one saw the other. All the women were engaged in the war, it was truly a holy war. The Russians themselves could not refuse their admiration of this magnificent effort.

Ah, the noble struggle! The children's children of that time have never forgotten it. This last uprising of the whole of Ukraine was glorious, especially after defeat. Happy the nations, small or great, who have a right to sing their *Gloria Victis*!

The winter, that year, was of exceptional severity, the crows and wolves were frozen to death in the forests. Pity them, if you like, but do not pity the peasants. Winter is their friend. Summer reigns for them then around the stove. Besides, under the protection of the accumulated snow, the cottages guard themselves. The enemy is no more to

be feared, he has taken up his winter quarters in the cities.

The men can at last dress their glorious wounds without hiding them as a disgrace. It is no longer necessary for them to go down in the cellar to rub up and repair their weapons; they can make their ammunition at their leisure, stretch out their arms, and rest, relax their muscles, stiffened by too long-continued efforts. From village to village they can see each other again, visit each other, and count their losses. They mourn for the cherished dead, celebrate their brave actions, and especially try to count their forces in reserve for the future.

Plans and preparations occupy the chiefs. Where is Tchétchevik? Ask rather where he is not? But where he appears the most frequently, if only for an instant, to illumine everything as by a flash of lightning, is in an inaccessible retreat, selected and reserved by him for his two principal *aides de camp*. Is it necessary for me to name Méphodiévna and Maroussia? They are not those who have the least need of seeing him. For warriors like them this forced inaction of winter, this time

lost, seemed very long. If there are eternal moments, they are the moments unemployed.

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* *

CHRISTMAS.

But of what has Maroussia been thinking for some time? Her golden head droops on her shoulder like a flower too heavy for its stem. She tries in vain to arouse herself in order not to grieve her good friend. A dream seems to overcome her and separate her from her friends, she is no more with them, her eyes look far away. Where do they look? What do they see? How can it be that even before Tchetchevik, his little friend is absent-minded. The heart of a little girl is like a dense forest, the good friend must have sharp eyes.

Can he, who does not trouble himself with the smallest sorrows of others, be truly great? Ah, believe me, the really strong are always the gentlest. One morning, Maroussia's head drooped more than usual, and her eyes looked farther away into the distance, though the sun was shining brightly. From the window, where the child stood to see the country all

covered with snow as it shone like a polished mirror beneath the brilliant light of the great luminary, it would seem that only bright and joyous thoughts ought to come to her. But no, she was silent ; if she were unhappy, which seemed very probable, she did not wish to give pain to those whom she loved.

Tchetchevik exchanged a glance with Méphodiévna. The time to speak had come. Putting his hand on Maroussia's shoulder, he roused her from her dream, and called her attention to a sleigh, which stood below the window.

"Do you not see him," said the good friend, "do you not see your favorite Iskra ? He is pawing the ground, he already wishes to start."

"To take you away again," said the child, much moved.

"To take me away ? Yes," he answered. "But there is, after all, room for two in this sleigh, and if some one whom I know very well wishes to accompany me, I will not go alone."

"Some one," said Maroussia, whose eyes were fixed on Méphodiévna : "some one ?—"

and the rest of this questioning look seemed to say: "then I shall be left without friends? Very well, if it is necessary,—leave me alone." But this mute complaint was not expressed even by a sigh.

"It is not meant for me," Méphodiévna said, smiling. "No, I must, on the contrary, stay here; and, besides, the second place is too small for a grown person like me."

"To fill this place," said the good friend, "I need a very small companion, whom I can, when necessary, forget in a fold of my furs, but whose little heart will keep me warm just the same during a long and rapid journey. I want a little companion decided to take the same journey as I do at one stretch, who is not afraid of winter with its red nose, and whom it will delight more than any one else to go to the same place where I am going, to ascertain exactly with her own eyes and ears what is taking place down there, in the cottage with the cherry-trees,—you know it, Maroussia, the very one where we became acquainted, a father, a mother, little brothers and sisters, who perhaps fear that for the first

time there will be an empty place at their table for the Christmas dinner."

Maroussia understood,—a loud cry came from the depths of her heart, then a sob, she pressed herself against the breast of the Lion, but a smile shone through her tears, a smile so full of gratitude to her two friends, that their eyes also became moist.

"Ah, Christmas, Christmas in my father's house! Christmas near my mother, her blessing once more on my head! Christmas with my little brothers and sisters about me! Ah, you guess everything. You knew that it was of this I have been thinking in spite of myself, ever since the day of the great feast has been drawing near," and grateful tears bathed her happy face.

The preparations were soon made, the departure took place at once. At first sight all one could have seen was a man wrapped up in his furs, urging a vigorous horse, but through the ample wraps of the traveler, Méphodiévna, from the window, could see two large eyes, whose gentle glances came to her and plainly said: "Thank you."

Four days afterward the sleigh returned.

Maroussia, with her heart filled with the happiness which she had given and received, Maroussia, blessed by her father and mother, eaten up with kisses by her little brothers and sisters, feasted by all the neighbors, honored by all the friends of her father, and by strangers themselves who knew that, little girl as she was, she had been with the Lion and the beautiful Méphodiévna, a faithful servant of Ukraine. Maroussia again took her post near her good friend. The proverb very well says: "A father's house is a full cup to a thirsty child."

*
* *

AND AFTER;—

Why cannot we stop here? Why must we follow the story in its bitterest realities? Why must we tell all, continue to the last, and, after the brilliant commencement, relate the sad ending?

The Lion Tchetchevik, after having prepared everything in the dark, thought that the sun of a second year would make his success more fruitful. Everybody thought so, even more than he. We are assured that

it was more than once a question in the enemy's council, whether they should not offer peace to this man, the bravest among the brave, the most generous among all generous souls, an honorable peace, acceptable to Ukraine. They wanted this glorious young man for a friend, for an ally; they would have been glad in Russia to have him belong entirely to themselves. Everybody was talking of his great deeds, of how grand and terrible he was in the midst of battle, but also how compassionate and gentle when the combat was ended.

The account of his defense of Gadiatch, taken and retaken three times from the enemy, was in every one's mouth, and will never be forgotten. This perfect hero only needed a Homer. The army which he fought extolled him in the highest terms, on both sides the wounded and dying called him their father. Each one called him to his aid. The names of those forever dear to Ukraine are the Lion Tchetchevik, Méphodiévna, and the angel Maroussia.

But, alas, where are we? Do you remember the dark beginning, the journeys by night,

the secret plotting? We have returned to them. Yes, everything must begin over again.

The counsels of force prevailed. The powerful enemy took its own time and returned in overwhelming numbers. They knew too well, they had learned at their own expense what Ukraine was, what the Cossack and the peasant were able to do, to venture again heedlessly into such a noble country.

On our side, everything is taken up afresh and with less chance of success. Nevertheless, honor remained to be vindicated, and each one said: "We will vindicate it." Force may kill the right, but cannot abolish it.

Shame to those who ask: "What is the use of this desperate fighting?" Can a man abandon his mother in her suffering? Can he leave his sister to be the prey of the enemy? Can he desert his betrothed, his wife, his children, his home and his farm? Can he abandon his country which contains all these to the invader, as long as he has a drop of blood in his veins? No, he cannot do it.

"It would be better to surrender, and the shame will cost less," murmured the cowards. Ah! Let them be silent, let them hide them-

selves, let them return forever into the earth, these counselors of infamy. Persons who think thus are like crawling reptiles, they are despised even by the enemy himself.

. No! No! There is nothing worse than disgrace. Only those will arise again, on the day of judgment, in the better world, who have known how to die nobly here. And even if the day of reparation never comes, what does it matter? We must leave good deeds behind us, they are imperishable. History will gather them together, the wealth of the children consists in their fathers having sacrificed everything to their duty.

This is what the Ukrainians think, this is what the poorest in Ukraine will say to himself in a hundred, in two hundred, yes, in a thousand years from now.

As to the Russians, they are of my opinion. Would you be proud of having conquered hares or sheep?

Let us return to our story.

CHAPTER XX.

LAST WREATHS.

EVERYTHING had been unfortunate and disastrous.

"Have we much farther to go?" asked Maroussia.

"Are you very tired, my child?" said Tchetchevik.

"No, I am not tired, but I would like to know if we have much farther to go."

"Happily, no. Do you see that forest on our right? Well then, it is there that we are going to rest. But you are exhausted, my child."

"No, no,—I assure you, I assure you that I am not."

"You say you are not tired," replied her good friend, smiling. "Are you very sure of it? You know the punishment reserved in the next world for those who have not, even with the best intentions, spoken the truth in this life? To purify their tongues, they are

condemned to lick a red-hot iron. Have you no fear for your little tongue?"

"I do not think that I need fear the red-hot iron," answered Maroussia, and her white teeth shone between her lips half-opened by a smile.

Nevertheless, having reflected a moment, the little girl added, fixing her clear, large eyes on the Envoy:

"Do you know, I would rather lick the red-hot iron, than stop, when it is necessary to go on."

"I know a way of arranging the matter," said her good friend.

And before she had time to object, the little girl was in his arms.

"No! No! I do not want you to carry me again," she exclaimed. "You are more tired than I am, I will not, I will not—"

And she said to herself: "It is a shame for a soldier who has been in so many battles," the soldier was herself, "who has been conqueror and even conquered, to allow herself to be carried, unless she is wounded."

But the strong arms of the Envoy did not know how to loosen, when they had once

taken hold of anything. A few gentle words overcame the objections of the little soldier, Maroussia put her arms around the bronzed neck of her good friend and rested her head on his broad shoulder. After a whole year of exciting life, during which she had endured more than could have been expected, the little heroine was happy to find herself again a little child.

The day was declining. The sun's rays were no longer so burning. The road, or rather the path, wound sometimes through fields of barley, rye, and wheat,—there were still in that section some farms that had not been destroyed,—sometimes through little green groves, filled with flowers, perfumes, and birds' nests. Birds with varied song and plumage, all sorts of butterflies, battalions of wild bees, were flying and buzzing as if nothing in the world had been changed. Their own little bit of Ukraine had not been touched, and they did not suspect anything.

The sun's rays shone through the foliage without remembering that the day before and not very far from there, they had lighted up and gilded a massacre.

From time to time a church tower could be seen rising to the right or the left, or the glimmering of a little lake, pool, or river, or instead they saw a village at the end of a prairie, whose houses still white shone among the gardens and orchards, sometimes it was only a deserted hamlet, half hid in the verdure.

They came to a field. "How many cornflowers," said Tchetchevik; "look, Maroussia, we have never seen so many or such beautiful ones."

Words cannot express all there was of gentleness in the accent of Tchetchevik when he spoke to the little girl, a young mother could not have had other smiles in her eyes, or more of tenderness in her voice for her little child.

"Do you know, Maroussia," continued her good friend, "I think we shall do well to seat ourselves here; your little hands can make me a wreath of these cornflowers, which I wish very much."

He placed the little girl on the grass, and stretching out his long arms began to gather all the flowers within his reach.

"Gather those with long stems," said Ma-

roussia to him, "it is easier to make the wreath with them, and they will also make it stronger."

The Envoy, obliged to go farther to gather the flowers, said to her :

"Rest yourself until I have brought a sufficient quantity. Don't stir. If you could only sleep a little !"

"No, no," said Maroussia. "I will not move ; I will rest, but I cannot sleep. I like better to see you gather the flowers."

The Envoy was not very skilful. In order to get them with long stems, he sometimes pulled up the entire plant.

"You mustn't do that," Maroussia said to him, "it is a loss for those who come after us and also for the next year. The plants pulled up by the root do not grow any more. That isn't the way to make the most of the harvest. In my mother's house, you would be reprov'd for it."

Her good friend felt that he was justly corrected, but he did not become discouraged, he only tried to do better.

"I am not a famous flower-gatherer," he said. "I am like the poor fellow who, wish-

ing to pray to God in the church and to kiss the ground, gave himself a bump on the forehead by striking his head on the marble floor."

"Don't tell me anything to make me laugh," said Maroussia. "Stop, enough, enough! Come and be seated, you have gathered so many flowers that I cannot find myself among them. I have enough to make a hundred wreaths."

And the little girl tried to arrange the flowers in some order.

"Don't spare them, then," said her good friend. "Do you want some more?"

"No, no, these are enough, ten times more than I want. Rest yourself now, in your turn."

The Envoy, convinced, seated himself by her side, and followed, with much interest, first the work of the little fingers arranging the wreath, then the changes of Maroussia's face. From having been almost gay just now, she became thoughtful.

"Of what is my child thinking?" he asked Maroussia. She hesitated to answer; but very soon, hiding her golden head on the bosom of her good friend:

"I was thinking," she said, "I was thinking of the blue-bottle flowers at home, and of the wreaths of other days which gave my little brothers so much pleasure, and also of those which my mother made for me when I was very small."

"That was in the happy time," said Tche-tchevik, "when children did not have the duty of being heroes. Ah, dear little girl, my visit to your father's and mother's house was not a happy thing for you, nor for them either, the good people! May God obtain their pardon for me!"

The child quickly put her hand over his mouth and burst into tears.

"Hush," she said. "Don't make me cry just now. Don't take away the courage which my father himself commanded me to have—the courage which I still need, which I must have, and which I will have unto the end. As to our life since we left home together, Ah, what a good life! Ah, what beautiful days! Ah, what a noble dream! But now—our soldiers, where are they? Méphodiévna, our Méphodiévna who loved you and Ukraine so much, where is she?"

Tchetchevik in his turn stopped her :

"Yes, where is she?" he said, and hid his sad face in his hands. Neither the man nor the child thought of conversing any more.

Maroussia was the first to overcome her emotion, and, trying to free Tchetchevik's face from his hands, which still hid it from her sight, she fixed her tearful eyes on him, and in a tone of voice which scarcely trembled, said with a smile :

"See, I am no longer sad."

Not receiving any answer, she rested her cheek on his shoulder and caressed him timidly. Tchetchevik lifted up his head, and looking at his little companion, said :

"But you are suffering beyond your strength, poor child."

"And you also, you suffer beyond your strength, and everybody does the same ! All the country—"

"Oh, yes ! All the country—"

"Who does not suffer ?" said Maroussia, "only the birds, the happy birds, to whom it matters little, go from one branch to another, or rest upon this rather than upon that one.

But recall to yourself what you said so well to everybody not long ago, which was heard from one hill to another above the plains: 'Forward!' And with what a voice you urged them all! How you led them into battle! The whole people followed you. Maroussia alone follows you now; but just the same give her your command, 'Forward!' and she will be ready to march."

The child had arisen.

At these words, Tchetchevik did the same, they took each other by the hand and started on their journey. Having gone a short distance, they saw a village. A narrow road covered with grass led to it.

"Do you see this village, Maroussia?" her good friend said to her.

"Yes, I see it," she answered.

"It is large, is it not?"

"Yes, it seems large to me."

"Well, then, the larger a village is in our unhappy Ukraine, the more wives, mothers, sisters, and children who weep, for by this little road and others like it, their husbands, sons, and brothers have gone to battle, and no one can tell how many will come back

again. These times are hard beyond all others, Maroussia, do you understand?"

"Yes, indeed, I understand!" she exclaimed.

They walked again a long time, but in silence.

The forest, which they saw in the distance stretching out like a blue shadow, began to show its beautiful green color as they drew near it. They could see on its border the deep green of the oak and the lighter colored foliage of the birch.

"We have reached here," said the Envoy, pushing aside the branches and penetrating the underwood. "We will soon find a thicket where we can make a new halt."

It was not easy to find the thicket. The forest was so dense that it was almost impossible to advance. Not to speak of the branches which struck their faces, the thorns which tore their clothes, caught their hair, scratched and lacerated them, and the trunks of dead trees lying on the ground which barred their way, gigantic hop-vines interlaced all this vegetation at the top, while

ground ivy and a thousand running plants were twined about it below.

Nevertheless, Tchetchevik knew where he wished to go, for he examined every bush, listened to every sound, and at times stopped to reflect and to search for a trace or an indication on the ground or in the grass which he wished to find.

At last they reached the thicket. Close at hand was a clearing where there was more space than they needed to make a halt on the grass.

"Rest yourself, Maroussia. Do you see this grass, this moss? Our rich Ataman himself does not possess such a brilliant carpet. Oh, if this luxury had satisfied him! If he had comprehended sooner that gold is not even a demigod, but the worst of idols. Be seated under this oak, it is the great Ataman of the forest. It is a thousand years old, perhaps. It has seen everything but does not fail yet. The stars of heaven have always been enough for its head."

The oak tree was truly magnificent. It stretched its majestic branches in all directions, and formed by itself alone a sort of

fresh and sacred temple, where at the same time reigned coolness, shade and silence. The sun's rays could not penetrate its thick foliage, its top alone was lighted.

Very near this tree the trunk of another oak, which must have been the equal of the one still standing, was lying on the ground, vanquished by years. Not a leaf was left of all those which had been the pride of its life. Tchetchevik, looking at it, began to think aloud.

"This tree," he said, "has never been touched by the axe. It has never been subject to the violence of man, its old limbs are free from wound, even the lightning has respected it, and yet here it lies on the ground. Thus everything that has life marches by days or by ages toward what seems to be an end. A few years more and this colossus will return to the dust, but the dust is fruitful, and very soon the oak will become a blade of grass. Small or great, resurrection awaits all alike. A grain of sand is indestructible, is immortal, for a much greater reason are our souls immortal; in truth, life here below is so short, that it is scarcely worth while to worry

over it, since it belongs to God more than to us."

Maroussia listened astonished.

"He is no doubt praying," she said to herself, "he is sad, he does well."

Strangely enough, they perceived on the trunk of the old oak a wreath of cornflowers almost like the one Maroussia had just made. How could it be? The flowers were still fresh.

Maroussia's eyes were turned at the same time as those of her good friend toward this strange sight, but she no more showed surprise. This reserve did not astonish Tchetchevik. He took the wreath and threw it in Maroussia's lap.

"The two will make a pair," he said. "I can tell everything to you, Maroussia. This wreath tells us that very soon we shall not be alone in the forest, our friends are coming, our scouts have preceded them."

Suddenly, from the depths of the wood a cry was heard, but only the cry of a bird as it seemed to Maroussia.

"It is a young one, no doubt," said the Envoy. "Its voice has not fully developed

yet. An older would be heard better. Listen, Maroussia, I am going to give a lesson to this voice."

And with the help of his fingers brought up close to his mouth, Tchetchevik gave a bird's cry so shrill that the most powerful singer of the forest would not have disowned it. This cry, heard without doubt for many miles around, was very soon echoed back. From three different places similar cries answered it.

"You must not be uneasy," said Tchetchevik to Maroussia, "you see what it is about. I am obliged to leave you alone a few moments. Stay here, do not change your place, I will return for you very soon. Do not leave your post."

"I will stay here," answered Maroussia.

And she thought: "They are our friends to whom he has given orders or instructions, for the rest of our men flying and followed as we are. It is to save them, to guide them, or to reassemble them again."

Her good friend had pushed aside the branches and was going to force a passage through the underbrush, but a thought struck



"ABOVE ALL, NO SAD THOUGHTS."

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him, and he turned around ; he wished once more to look upon his brave companion.

"Especially," he said to her, "no sad thoughts, let nothing overcome you to-day, or ever."

"No, I am not sad," answered Maroussia, "I am firm. Be easy then, I can do everything, even die without sorrow, at present."

They exchanged a last look full of mutual tenderness, and Tchetchevik disappeared through the thick foliage.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE RED HANDKERCHIEF.

MAROUSSIA bent down to hear the sound of Tchetchevik's footsteps as long as possible. If her ears could hear him, even though her eyes were not able to follow him, she would be less anxious. As long as she could hear him, she felt as if he was still there. But soon all crackling of branches, all rustling of leaves ceased, Maroussia let her two wreaths drop down, her pretty head drooped, and without suspecting it, she began to think, yes, to think.

Subjects for thought were not wanting.

She had seen so many startling things, so many mysterious and terrible things, and the last had been so distressing! The defenders of Ukraine, at first so glorious, everything giving way before them, now crushed and dispersed. "I know very well that my good friend is going to make a last effort. It is hopeless, perhaps. But what does it matter?"

He will do it. Ought he to stop in his duty?" She had felt during this long forced journey, that each step hid a danger. "Well then, afterward? Tchetchevik and herself, the true Ukrainians, could they survive Ukraine? Would it not be better to disappear with those we love?"

She puzzled her head in trying to explain why men, instead of loving each other, which seemed so easy to her, endeavored to destroy each other. "Did my father ever seek to quarrel with his neighbors? Did he ever have the thought of wishing to take another man's farm and house, although he had often seen many fine farms and beautiful houses? Why do they wish to take our Ukraine from us? It is a very fruitful country, one of the best in the world, is that a reason for driving away those to whom it belongs?"

From time to time, tired with asking herself questions which the greatest minds are unable to answer, she would raise her head and with her sincere eyes looking toward heaven say: "Heavenly Father, when will men be good?"

The calmness and deep silence of the for-

est, its shade and fresh air, would have benefited very much her sorely tired body, if her anxious mind had allowed her to rest, instead of worrying about everything about her as the time grew longer.

The forest became dark, gradually an invisible hand drew a gigantic black veil over these masses of verdure. This recalled to her mind the forest in her story of the brigands, and the flight of the poor wife, which she had related to Tchetchevik the first time she had seen him. "She was not more unhappy than I am," thought Maroussia, "but I prefer my trouble to hers."

The last rays of light which had penetrated through the foliage were fading away on the trunks of the trees. They disappeared altogether and night came suddenly. Maroussia, surprised, arose. All the anxiety of the past was as nothing to the agony of the present.

"He said to me: 'I will return for you *very soon*, I leave you *for a few moments*,—remain at your post.' I am at my post," said the child, "many moments have passed by, he does not come, and there is no sound, even in the distance, of his return."

Nature itself seemed determined to be silent. In spite of herself, this terrible stillness was too much for Maroussia's firmness of mind.

Alas ! if this silence had only continued. But, suddenly gun-shots were heard on all sides, more than a hundred, than a thousand perhaps ; it seemed as if they were fighting in all the recesses of the forest at once. It lasted about ten minutes, but it appeared an age to Maroussia. Nevertheless, longer and more terrible to her was the fearful silence which followed this noise of war, familiar indeed to her ears. She wished to see between and under the trees ; moved as if by an electric spring, she arose on tiptoe.

"He is in the midst of this shooting," she said to herself ; "he was armed, he must have wished to open a passage for a portion of our army in the direction of the frontier. They have been surprised in this forest full of ambushades."

And, pressing her burning forehead in her feverish hands, she added :

"I must not think any more. For what good is it ? God is above. We must await our destiny from Him."

She seated herself again at the foot of the giant oak, praying for all those dear to her.

Deep in fervent prayer, at the moment when she said, "Father, permit me to see him again," she thought that she was dreaming, that she heard the foliage move, the branches broken. But, no, she was not dreaming, the noise came from a spot very near, only a few steps from her. She looked toward the place whence it came. The branches were entirely pushed aside, and the face of Tchetchevik, lighted by the pale moon, which had just risen, appeared through the moving foliage. God, then, had answered her prayer! But was it indeed her good friend, or only his shadow? His face was so pale that the child's cry of joy died on her lips.

"Maroussia," said Tchetchevik to her, "do you see this red handkerchief?"

"Yes, I see it."

"Well, then, I am going to lead you to the edge of the forest. I will show you a road. You will follow it, without leaving it, straight forward, always straight forward, until you come to a field of buckwheat; you will go through this field of buckwheat, it is divided

by a path. This path will lead you to a little bridge; let your two wreaths fall on this bridge. On the other side of the bridge, at the left, behind a little mill you will see a small grove of trees. A man will come out of the edge of this grove. If he says to you, 'May God help you!' you will answer: 'He has helped me!' and you will give him this red handkerchief. You understand me, Maroussia? You will forget nothing?"

Her good friend spoke slowly, more slowly than usual, and as if forced to do so, as if he was not able to speak faster. He became whiter and whiter, great drops of sweat stood on his forehead. He leaned against a tree.

"You are wounded!" Maroussia exclaimed. "They have shot you!"

"It is only a scratch, Maroussia, to-morrow it cannot be seen. Go, Maroussia, my dear child, go!"

He took her by the hand.

"How cold your hand is!" exclaimed the child.

"Don't think of my hand, dear heart. Hasten! First, the two wreaths on the bridge, then the handkerchief to the man

who will come out of the grove, if he says to you, 'May God help you!' Courage, Maroussia, it is for the safety of those who are left of the brave defenders of Ukraine."

Tchetchevik tried to make a passage through the underbrush for Maroussia, but had not strength enough. This weakness on the part of him whom she had regarded as the personification of strength, froze the little girl's heart. For the first time, she trembled for him whom she had thought invulnerable. But she did not ask him any question. She understood that he had said all that he intended to say.

Suddenly, two strong arms broke through the foliage. The little girl, surprised, threw herself in front of her good friend, whom she thought in danger.

"Don't be afraid, Maroussia," said Tchetchevik, "this is a friend, a sure and faithful friend."

Maroussia saw, among the branches, a tall peasant who saluted her in a respectful but friendly manner. It was evident that this was not the first time that he had seen her.

"This is my comrade, Peter," said the good friend; "look at him, he is an oak also."

"He is taller than you," said Maroussia astonished.

Peter pushed aside and broke the branches before Maroussia. He walked backward, and his anxious glances never left Tchetchevik.

Maroussia saw very well that Peter thought that her good friend had need of help. But Tchetchevik, who was leaning against a tree, said to him :

"Go, Peter, you must not think of me, think of the others. At any price, you must prevent their falling into this cursed ambush."

Peter, thus reproved, broke through everything, the branches bent or were broken under the weight of his body and his feet as if a bull were passing through. Maroussia had not expected to go out of the forest so quickly. Her good friend succeeded in following her. He kept renewing his instructions :

"You see the road, the field of buckwheat and its path are to the right, at the end of the path the little bridge, the two wreaths to be left on the little bridge, to the left, on the other side the mill and the little grove, the man and the handkerchief. You must reach

there. Hasten, my dear little child! Hasten! Here is the handkerchief."

This handkerchief was so like the one she had once given to Méphodiévna, that she asked herself if it was not the same, and if again it was not intended to reach her.

Maroussia took the handkerchief and, reaching her forehead to her good friend, said: "All shall be done as you wish."

Tchetchevik stooped down, not without effort, to embrace her. But on rising up she saw very plainly that he staggered, and but for Peter, who hastened to catch him, he would have fallen. Maroussia then saw blood on her sleeve.

"Your blood!" she said to him. "Where are you wounded? Is it in the arm? Let me bandage it? You know Méphodiévna taught me to be a good nurse."

"Be reasonable, Maroussia," said her good friend. "I have passed through everything until now, without being touched. It was not right. I have not had my share. This wound is nothing. A shot in the arm is not a great thing. We didn't undertake this campaign expecting to eat strawberries.

Peter will arrange it. Go, then, my dear child, and hasten! We are talking too much. If you succeed in giving this handkerchief to him who is waiting for it, that will be a very good thing. But, now I think of it, arrange it on your head, they will see it sooner and at a greater distance, and it will look very well on your golden hair."

"But you, are you going to stay here? We must be suspicious of everything in this forest.—Shall I find you here again?" While asking these questions, she was arranging, with trembling hands, the red handkerchief on her head.

"I will stay here," answered her good friend, "or if I cannot, I will know where to rejoin you. Can anything separate us?"

This time a shot answered for the child, and then another. From ten places all at once the firing was heard, not very near, yet not very far.

"They have re-entered the forest, they return to the charge," said Peter. "In five minutes they may be there."

The Lion stood up. Peter put one of his pistols in the hand he was still able to use.

"You hear," said Tchetchevik to Maroussia. "Go! Run! Fly, if you can! Forget everything else. It is for Ukraine and your good friend. The little handkerchief will speak to him of you—"

Maroussia started like an arrow. Nevertheless, when she had reached the path in the field of buckwheat, where she must leave the road, the little girl could not resist the desire to turn around and try once more to see him whom she had left with so much regret. No one was at the edge of the forest. The firing had not continued. The forest, grown silent again, was only a long mountain of shade.

Maroussia starts on, there is no more question of fatigue, her good friend wishes it, she has wings. Having passed through the buckwheat field, here is the little bridge, she places the two wreaths upon it. A dull noise strikes her ear. She listens. The noise approaches and becomes louder. It sounds like a horse coming at a gallop. Is the rider a friend or an enemy? He is not a Cossack. From a distance he looks like a Tartar. When she traveled with the old singer, they always avoided the Tartars. She retraces

her steps and recrosses the bridge. Anyhow the wreaths are there, so much is done. Maroussia is satisfied. She tries to hide herself in the reeds. The horseman comes at full speed, has he seen her? She hopes not. But Maroussia has scarcely taken a few steps among the reeds, which are growing on the bank of the little brook, when a shot is fired. The red handkerchief and the pretty head fall down in the midst of the reeds. You might have thought it a partridge arrested in its flight.

The Tartar horseman had crossed the bridge. He wishes to be sure that his shot has taken effect; without dismounting he looks, he sees the graceful body lying there. It is only a child! But what is this red handkerchief which she has on her head? A rag, his ball has pierced it. It is not worth while for him to take it.

The Tartar gave his horse the spur, went on his way, and disappeared like a man deceived in his expectation. Maroussia to him was only a shadow, imperfectly seen on his route.

Everything became quiet again. It was so

quickly done. It seemed as if nothing had happened at the end of the bridge.

Nevertheless, a peasant, carrying a heavy fagot of wood on his shoulder, comes with slow steps from the little grove which Marousia was to find at the left of the bridge. Then, he passes by the mill, to which the pale light of the moon has given a silver color. He isn't hurried, he looks neither to the right nor to the left. He does not suspect that, just now, the road which he is taking was not very safe.

He enters the bridge. He sees the two wreaths, he takes them and hangs them on his fagot. Doubtless he has little daughters, he will take the wreaths to them. He crosses the bridge. His load tires him, he puts it down an instant, and, to rest himself, leans with his elbows on the trunk of the tree which serves for a parapet. From there he looks carelessly around. What is it that he sees among the reeds? It looks like a bouquet of flowers. He must see it nearer. It is a child! One of her feet is in the water. He is on his knees. He lifts the inanimate body and places it a little further up the bank.

The full moon is shining. He looks with pity on the beautiful face, white in death, places his hand on the brave little heart which beats no more, makes the sign of the cross, and speaks these words, "May God help you," to which the little girl cannot reply, "God has helped me"; he arises, and, forgetting his load, keeping only his wreaths, he runs quickly away. He recrosses the bridge, where is he going so fast? Beyond the mill to the little grove. How he hastens to get there! What does he press on his breast? What does he hide under his shirt? It is the pretty red handkerchief, which ornamented the golden head of the little girl who loved her country so much. He carries it away with him. The red handkerchief and the wreaths reached their destination. Marousia has fulfilled her mission. The others, the last faithful ones and her good friend are saved.

CHAPTER XXII.

GLORIA VICTIS.

ALL this took place a long, long time ago. After a hundred, two hundred years perhaps, this legend remains. And now, on the top of an artificial hill, made by the hand of man, the largest of all those of the same kind to be found in Ukraine, can be seen a large cross of red granite. On this cross, the patient point of a dagger has engraved the name :

MAROUSSIA.

The entire hill is called the Kourgane, it is the tomb of the little girl. It is covered with beautiful green grass strewn all over with lovely, sweet-smelling flowers which grow there only, and are never seen elsewhere. These flowers are so beautiful that you might take them for the smiles of a child. When transplanted, they refuse to grow and die immediately. People have tried to sow the seeds in other places, but they refuse to come up. A name has been given to them, the only one which seems appropriate,—they are called MAROUSSIA.

The people relate her story in the long evenings, at home. They say that a Cossack, famous for his courage, intelligence, beauty and goodness, and still more for his patriotism, made this large hill.

He had only one arm, having lost the other in the last battle fought for the independence of Ukraine, and, with the one hand left him, carrying the soil, handful by handful, he built this hill. It took years and years for him to accomplish it. Young when he began, his beard and his hair were white when he finished it. However, some say that a little boy, named Tarass, begged so much to be allowed to help, that his aid was accepted, and that this boy also grew old before the tomb was finished. This much is certain. that when the Kourgane was as high as a church steeple, and the cross was placed on it, the Cossack seated himself at its foot and wept until he died. Before this, no one had ever seen the Lion weep. It was the tears that fell from his eyes which produced these flowers so beautiful and so sweet, which had never before bloomed in any part of the world.

Those who know the language of flowers,

assure us, that on the nights when the moon is full, these flowers can be heard to murmur : " We bloom only on the graves of those who have given their lives for their country."

The children, girls and boys, accompanied by their parents, come every year from all parts of the country, on pilgrimages to the tomb of the little girl. Each one brings a wreath and places it there. They carry away with them pictures and medals made in honor of Maroussia.

Many of these children cry when the glorious death of the heroic child is related to them, and yet there is not one of them, boys or girls, who does not wish that he or she might have been MAROUSSIA.

Unfortunately there is more than one Ukraine in the world. God grant, that in every country subject to a conqueror's yoke, there may be born many children, capable of living and dying like the little Maroussia whose story I have just related to you.

No one can explain the triumphs of the wicked and the trials of the just.

FINIS.



EACH ONE BRINGS A WREATH.

Marousia, Page 268.

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